

PCZONE

THE FIRST AND BEST PC GAMES MAGAZINE

ISSUE 124 JANUARY 2003 £4.99

**WORLD
EXCLUSIVE**

ENTER THE MATRIX

The wait is over. The world's most anticipated game revealed

**HARDWARE ROUND-UP:
GAMING PCs**
The best system you can buy,
whatever your budget

REVIEWED

**LORD OF THE RINGS
NEOCRON
NEW WORLD ORDER
HARRY POTTER
AND THE CHAMBER
OF SECRETS**

**MASSIVE 40 PAGE
PREVIEW SPECIAL**

**101
GAMES
OF
2003**

**EXCLUSIVE SHOTS
FROM THE BEST
GAMES OF 2003**

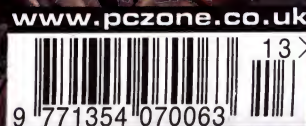
INCLUDING...

UNREAL 2

THE ONLY MAG THAT'S PLAYED THE GAME

PLUS DEUS EX 2

**HOMEWORLD 2, STAR WARS:
GALAXIES, FULL THROTTLE 2,
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4,
DOOM 3
AND MUCH
MORE...**



AMERICAN CONQUEST

----- Three Centuries of War -----



IN THE YEAR 1492, TRAVEL TO AMERICA AS CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND IGNITE THE FIRE THAT WILL FAN 300 YEARS OF HEATED BATTLES FOR LAND, RICHES AND FREEDOM.

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"IF YOU THOUGHT THAT *COSSACKS* OFFERED A LOT OF UNIT TYPES, THIS FOLLOW-UP GAME BETTERS IT." **GAMESPY**

"THE FIRST RTS GAME CAPABLE OF RECREATING MANY GRAND HISTORICAL BATTLES ON THE SCALE WHICH THEY ACTUALLY OCCURRED" **PC ZONE**

"THIS PROMISES TO BE A TRULY EPIC GAME" **EUROGAMER**



www.americanconquest.com

Released: February 2003



"SURE TO BE ONE OF THE STRATEGY HITS OF 2003" PC ZON

FROM THE MAKERS OF COSSACKS



FEATURES

- EPIC REAL-TIME STRATEGY WITH ACCURATE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND
- FRANTIC BATTLES WITH UP TO 16,000 UNITS
- THREE CENTURIES OF WAR BETWEEN 1492 AND 1813
- 42 VERSATILE MISSIONS IN 8 THRILLING CAMPAIGNS: THE AMERICAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE, THE SEVEN YEARS WAR, PIZARRO'S EXPEDITION, AND THE WAR OF TECUMSEH, AMONGST OTHERS
- 9 SEPARATE SINGLE PLAYER MISSIONS
- 12 DIFFERENT NATIONS AND TRIBES: SPAIN, ENGLAND, FRANCE, AZTECS, INCAS, MAYAS, SIOUX, DELAWARE, HURON, IROQUOIS LEAGUE, PUEBLOS, USA
- 100 DIFFERENT UNITS AND 106 BUILDINGS
- TACTICAL FORMATIONS FOR INFANTRY, CAVALRY AND ARTILLERY USING OFFICERS, DRUMMERS AND STANDARD BEARERS
- REALISTIC ARTILLERY WITH GUNNER SQUADRONS
- ALL SHOOTING UNITS CAN FIGHT WITH SWORDS AND KNIVES (COLD STEEL ATTACK)
- HUGE MAPS (30x20 SCREENS; 1024x768 PIXELS)
- MULTIPLAYER MODE FOR UP TO 7 PLAYERS VIA LAN OR INTERNET.
- GAME MODES INCLUDE DEATHMATCH, RE-ENACTMENTS OF HISTORICAL BATTLES, AND AN AUTOMATIC CHAMPIONSHIP SYSTEM & GLOBAL RATING SYSTEM: "WAR FOR AMERICA"

PROJECT NOMADS



Disaster strikes!

Your planet has been reduced to a cluster of drifting islands. You, a Nomad, are one of the few survivors with one single goal: destroy those responsible for the catastrophe. Equip your island with weapons, armour, and magical items to create a roving battle giant.

You have work to do and the smell of revenge is in the air, in this unique 3D action, strategy adventure.

PC ZONE "It's easy to see why this remarkably distinctive sci-fi adventure/RTS won best PC game at ECTS"

PC Format "Nomads is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful games we've ever seen"

EUROGAMER "boasting gorgeous graphics, a novel setting, and gameplay that blended hands-on action with more strategic elements."

IGN "A sound, original concept, sweet looking visuals, a potentially awesome multiplayer mode, and a campaign that features a bunch of different types of play."

PC Format: 86% **games domain**: 4/5

winner of the 2001 "BEST PC GAME OF ECTS" Award



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PC



cdv
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ENTER THE MATRIX

PCZONE
ISSUE 124

ENTER THE MATRIX P30

Don't think you know how good this game will be, know how good it's going to be, with our massive World Exclusive preview.

Keeping it (Un)Real



We've just come back from the COMDEX show in Las Vegas, where we were shown the very latest games playing on the brand new GeForce FX graphics cards from

NVIDIA. The results? Absolutely stunning. We've got the first visuals running from the cards on page 116 and we've been promised the first review in the UK next issue. Can you tell we're excited?

The game that wowed us the most was *Unreal 2* and the good news is that the official release date has been bought forward to January. As well as seeing the latest code running at Vegas we were flown to Epic's offices to play through the game ourselves – we only had five hours in a room with the game but it was enough to make us believe that this could be the game of 2003. We're going to have the first review next issue, when we'll be able to let you know if it has lived up to the heady expectations we've got for it. In the meantime you'll have to put up with our initial thoughts on the way the game plays and the six pages of brand new exclusive screenshots you won't have seen in any other magazine in the world.

And talking of shots you won't have seen before, we've also managed to get our hands on the first in-game shots from the highly secretive *Enter The Matrix* game, due from Shiny Entertainment at the same time as the new film. And that's just two of the games we're getting unnaturally excited about out of the 101 titles we've marked as being the games to watch next year. The fun starts off on page 27, and if you thought 2002 was good just wait until you see what 2003 has got to offer.

And on that note, have a brilliant Christmas and a fantastic New Year. Cheers for reading PC ZONE in 2002 – see you next year.

Dave Woods
Editor

contents →



UNREAL 2: THE AWAKENING P32

The world's first playtest of the game everyone's waiting for. Read our definitive preview and find out why this could be the best FPS ever

101
GAMES
OF
2003

101 GAMES OF 2003 P27

The latest screenshots, info, rumours and release dates for the top 101 games of 2003. It's your definitive guide to the year ahead

COVER DISCS P142



■ 6 EXCLUSIVE DEMOS

- PLAY THEM HERE FIRST

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault – Spearhead, Mafia, Tennis Masters Series 2003, Post Mortem, Zoo Tycoon: Marine Mania and the latest Half-Life mod, Natural Selection.

■ 8 OTHER SUPERB PLAYABLE DEMOS INCLUDING...

Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos, Rollercoaster Tycoon 2, Platoon, Total Immersion Racing, Stronghold Crusader, Highland Warriors: Kilt Invaders Mini Game, Alex Ferguson's Player Manager 2003 and Far West.

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE: DVD ZONE

DVD-Video feature covering the Making Of FIFA 2003 with interviews from Ryan Giggs, Edgar Davids and Roberto Carlos. Exclusive game footage of X2: The Threat and the trailer for Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets. 2 demos not on the CDs, including Rallisport Challenge and Total Immersion Racing and all the featured mods in ModWatch.

■ NEW PATCHES

For Arx Fatalis, Enigma: Rising Tide, Hitman 2, Iron Storm, Medieval: Total War, Soldiers Of Anarchy, The Thing, Tribes 2, Unreal Tournament 2003, Warcraft III: Reign Of Chaos, Return To Castle Wolfenstein. Plus all the other latest and essential patches, movies and more.

■ ALSO

Exclusive to our DVD are DVD Zone Screenshot Packs, Wallpaper Packs, Essential Programs, Essential Drivers for the latest graphics cards and Essential Patches including archived patches from all the biggest PC titles.

■ Contents differ between the CDs and the DVD. Check the disc pages for more details.

BULLETIN

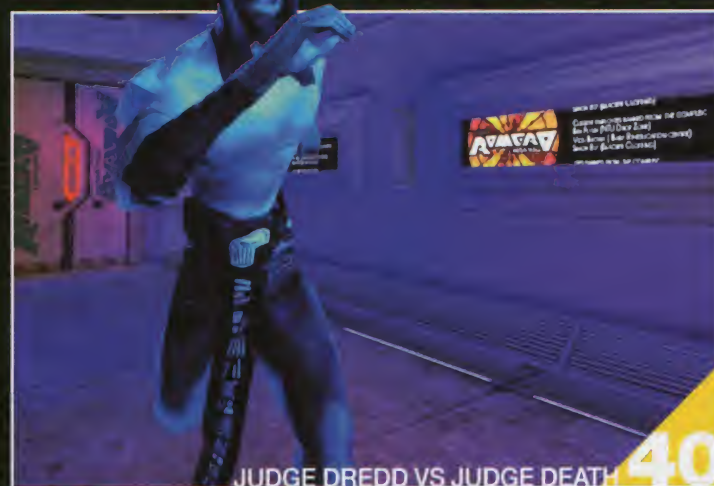
- 8 **PANZERS**
TANKS, TANKS AND MORE TANKS
IN THIS IMPRESSIVE LOOKING
WWII 3D RTS
- 10 **FULL THROTTLE II**
LUCASART'S MOTORCYCLING
ADVENTURE CLASSIC SPAWNS
A SEQUEL
- 15 **EMU ZONE**
WHAT'S NEW IN THE WORLD OF
PC EMULATION?
- 22 **CHARTS**
FIND OUT WHAT YOU'VE ALL BEEN
BUYING FOR THE LAST MONTH

FEATURES

- 158 **GAMES THAT CHANGED
THE WORLD**
A LOOK BACK AT AGE OF EMPIRES

HARDWARE

- 114 **NEWS**
- 118 **HARDWARE REVIEWS**
A RUN DOWN OF THE BEST GAMING
PCS ON THE MARKET
- 126 **DEAR WANDY**
HE'S A TECHNO WIZARD
- 128 **WATCHDOG**
YOU MOAN, WE MAKE OTHERS LISTEN



EXTENDED PLAY

- 136 **THE GUIDE**
HOW TO DESIGN A BOMBING RUN
LEVEL IN UT2003
- 140 **MODSQUAD**
THE BEST NEW MODS REVIEWED
- 142 **DISC PAGES**
- 146 **FIGHT CLUB**
PLAY ONLINE WITH AND AGAINST THE
PC ZONE TEAM
- 148 **MAILBOX**
YOUR VIEWS AND READER REVIEWS

REAR VIEW

- 152 **THE A-LIST**
YOUR ONE-STOP GAME BUYER'S
GUIDE
- 157 **RETROZONE**
A LOOK BACK AT LITTLE BIG
ADVENTURE 2
- 162 **COMMENT**
PHIL WAND HAS A RANT ABOUT
ONLINE GAMING SNOBS AND
TROUBLEMAKERS

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goes on sale Thursday January 9. Don't miss it!

contents

REVIEWS

76 LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
CAN YOU SAVE MIDDLE EARTH?

80 NEOCRON
FUTURISTIC MMORPG ACTION

83 TOTAL IMMERSION RACING
JUST LIKE REAL LIFE?

84 NEW WORLD ORDER
WILL IT BE THE NEW COUNTER-STRIKE?

86 HAEGEMONIA
STUPID NAME, GREAT GAME

88 HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS
SECOND PC OUTING FOR THE SPECCY MAGICIAN

90 PLATOON
COME GET SOME

93 RALLISPORT CHALLENGE
GET READY TO GET MUDDY

94 TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003
FOOOOOOOOOOOOOR

96 NBA LIVE 2003
SLAM DUNKIN' ACTION

98 DRIFT

98 POST MORTEM

101 KNIGHT RIDER

101 TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2003

102 RE-RELEASES
INCLUDING COMMANDOS 2, GUNMAN CHRONICLES, SOUL REAVER 2, KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME, STARTOPIA, ANACHRONOX AND MANY MORE

124 UPDATES
NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2
MULTIPLAYER REVIEW AND AN
UPDATE REVIEW OF BATTLE REALMS
(BUNDLED WITH THE NEW WINTER
OF THE WOLF EXPANSION PACK)

106 SUPERTTEST
BATTLE OF THE CRIME
GAMES, GRAND THEFT
AUTO III, MAFIA, KINGPIN:
LIFE OF CRIME, HITMAN 2
AND THIEF II



NEOCRON **80**



76

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING



HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS **88**

PREVIEWS

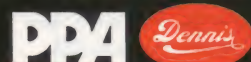
27: 101 GAMES OF 2003
ALL THE VERY LATEST INFORMATION
AND SCREENSHOTS FOR THE 101
HOTTEST GAMES OF 2003, INCLUDING
MASSIVE WORLD EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEWS OF...

28: ENTER THE MATRIX

**32: UNREAL II:
THE AWAKENING**

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WIN! THE COMPO NO ONE FINDS Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some PC goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: The Compo No One Finds (124), PC ZONE, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD. The first entry with the correct answer plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. The editor's decision is final. Closing date: January 8 2003. The winner of our December compo (122) is Mr P Newnham of Weston-Super-Mare. Well done.

**FIRST
Look!**

Achtung baby...

PANZERS

Pandas? From Hungary? In a 3D World War II strategy game?

TRANSLATOR Martin Korda

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

DEVELOPER Stormregion

PUBLISHER CDV

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Q4

WEBSITE www.stormregion.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Stunning 3D graphics engine
- More than 100 units to command
- Three massively diverse campaigns
- RPG elements
- Fully strategic landscape

S.W.I.N.E. No wait! Before you put this mag back on the shelf in indignation at my apparent rudeness, let me explain. That wasn't an insult aimed at you, although to be honest, this isn't a bloody library so why don't you go and buy this mag (great demos, news, previews and reviews at a bargain price – honest). Then we can continue in comfort without some snot-faced Saturday assistant giving you evils for spending too much time browsing through the PC mag section and not buying anything. There you go, that's better isn't it?

S.W.I.N.E., as I was about to explain, was the first game developer Stormregion were responsible for, a zany pig-versus-rabbit (oh, how we laughed) RTS that wasn't half bad, if a little limited and basic. Unlike their second game, *Panzers*, which is apparently going to revolutionise the 3D RTS genre. Yeah, yeah, yeah, but of course it is. Or is it?

To be fair, it is looking pretty damn impressive. So impressive in fact, that I travelled via a horse and cart to Hungary to grill project leader Tomas Szeremy about the game. Sadly he wasn't there when I arrived, but thankfully in my absence, news supremo Jamie Sefton emailed him some questions and got some rather positive replies. Tomas types: "*Panzers* combines real-time strategy with RPG elements. After choosing a side you'll control an officer – your hero – who is in charge of controlling your small but well-equipped detachment." To quote him further on this subject would take up too much room (Tomas is very vocal about this part of the game), so let me save a bit of space and summarise for a while.

A LOAD OF OLD TANK

There'll be three sides to play as. Lederhosen-loving fascist Germans, Pinko Ruskies and capitalist pig Allies. Each gifted with their own campaign, mission objectives and hardware that will vary considerably between sides, although one piece of hardware in particular will dominate each side. Tanks. Loads and loads and loads of massive, troop-crushing, house-levelling tanks to annihilate the enemy with as you charge across war-torn Europe in a bid for supremacy. But as Tomas explains, *Panzers* will offer much more than basic, brutal tank-warfare. "*Panzers* combines real-time strategy with RPG elements. Strategic options will include occupying enemy tanks and entering strong points and buildings."



Not even the trams run on time.



You never know what's round the next corner.

Tomas is also keen to point out, that while tank warfare provides the meat of the action, there'll be a variety of other weaponry and soldier types on offer too. "There are ten types of squads with different weapons and consisting of different numbers of soldiers – for example, the flamethrower squad, bazooka squad, AT-rifle squad and mortar squad. You can also upgrade them." Let me stop you there again Tomas, as I'm running out of room. Overall, you'll have over 100 vehicle types in your command, including dive-bombers, motorised anti-aircraft guns, artillery and jeeps to name but a few.

The massive unit diversity and apparent strategic depth certainly throws out hints that *Panzers* is steamrolling its way towards great things, and early playtests suggest it could be a better-looking and more accessible version of *Sudden Strike*. With its superb 3D engine, full strategic landscape, free-floating camera, and multitude of visual effects (dynamic lighting, destructible buildings, weather effects and so on) it's looking as appealing as it's sounding, and is shaping up to be a massive improvement on *S.W.I.N.E.* We'll be watching this one very closely. [A]



A bridge too far.



You know what's coming next.



Move your army using mouse click and drag.

"Loads and loads of massive, troop-crushing, house-levelling tanks to annihilate the enemy with"



The versatile 3D camera will allow you to zoom in and out of the carnage at will.

TANKS

The massive selection of World War II tanks will include the Tiger, Panther, T-34, KV-II, Sherman and Churchill – all your old favourites, in other words.

HARDWARE

Tanks will not be the only vehicles to kill the enemy with. Other hardware will include self-propelled and towed artillery, fighter planes, dive bombers and jeeps.

TROOPS

As well as dozens of vehicle types, you'll control countless different kinds of foot soldier, from standard grunts to anti-tank infantry. Nice.

TERRAIN

Terrain advantage will play a major role in how accurately and how far you'll be able to fire. It will also determine how fast your units can move – and where they can move too.

WATER

Dynamic lighting and shadows, along with the superb 3D engine, will make the landscape, and most noticeably the water, look stunningly realistic.

DEBRIS

The fully destroyable landscape will provide an extra level of strategy as no building will be safe from attack. Watch yourself when the roof caves in.

SMOKE

Fog over fields and swamps along with dust clouds caused by explosions will make the battlefield more believable, as well as offering concealment for units.



ALL THE LATEST NEWS, VIEWS AND GOSSIP FROM THE WORLD OF PC GAMING

BULLETIN

FULL THROTTLE

EXCLUSIVE! PC ZONE GRILLS LUCASARTS' TOM SARIS ABOUT FORTHCOMING

YEAR OF THE PC

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ Hi there. As well as our huge 2003 preview special this month (starting on page 29), we've also been packing the latest PC news into Bulletin, with some very special exclusives. Over the next two pages there's an interview with LucasArts' Tom Saris, who gave us the lowdown on *Full Throttle II*, the new Lawrence Holland WWII game and great news for fans of *Grim Fandango* and *Monkey Island*...

Plus we've interviews, info and new screenshots on Square's online RPG *Final Fantasy XI*, the gorgeous-looking WWII: RTS from Oleg Maddox (creator of the superb *IL-2: Sturmovik*), the new game from *Judge Death Vs Judge Death* developer Rebellion and an exciting upcoming title based on the *Warhammer 40K* universe from THQ, called *Fire Warrior*.

With all these stories of brand new titles, plus the massive 101 games preview special, 2003 looks as if it could be a classic year. The PC dead as a games machine? Balls. *Doom 3*, *Unreal II*, *Republic*, *Vietcong*, *Championship Manager 4*, *Halo* – the list just keeps going on and on. As the consoles continue to slowly dip their toes in online waters, us PC gamers can sit smugly in front of our pin-sharp VGA monitors knowing that all the above-mentioned titles will have multiplayer options as standard.

Anyhow, you'll also notice that as well as bringing you the hottest PC news, we've also been working doubly hard on spicing the Bulletin section up a bit with a pretty thorough tweaking. We hope you like the new look – don't forget to send us your views, comments, rants, gossip and dirty postcards to the usual email or snail mail PC ZONE addresses. Over and out.



Holland's new untitled game. Wow.

“A sequel to *Grim Fandango* is definitely something we want to exploit”



Tuskan Raider R.I.P. in KOTOR.

As global PR director for LucasArts, Tom Saris has the enviable job of overseeing the promotion of some of the most eagerly awaited PC games in the world. As well as the lucrative licences for *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*, plus the announcement of a new flight combat title from legend Lawrence

Holland, LucasArts has recently been delving into its back catalogue for 21st-century franchises. PC ZONE was granted an audience with Mr Saris, who discussed *Indy*, a sequel to *Sam & Max Hit the Road*, a new *Monkey Island* game, *Full Throttle II* and *Star Wars Episode VII*...

PCZ Is LucasArts committed to the PC as a games platform?

TS LucasArts' commitment to the PC remains as strong as it ever was. I think that's best proven by things like *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Knights Of The Old Republic*, PC versions of the adventures *Full Throttle II* and *Sam & Max 2*, and *Jedi Outcast*, which I think was really well received. I don't think the PC is something we'll ever move away from. It's an incredibly strong part of our legacy, and we'll always try to honour that.

PCZ Can you tell us about Lawrence Holland's new WWII game?

TS A little bit. We don't have a name for it yet – we're just about to get to that stage. It certainly takes its inspiration from *Secret Weapons Of The Luftwaffe* and the other games that sort of fell within that realm, but I think it's updated for a new generation. With someone like Lawrence Holland, who's just so incredibly talented and shown how successful he can be, it's

going to do well. Again I think there's a challenge there. How to strike an appeal, if that makes sense.

PCZ WWII flight sims are quite a niche genre though...

TS Well they are, yeah, but at its heart is great flight combat. And whether it's set in the *Star Wars* universe or in the World War II realm, a good flight combat game is a good flight combat game. I think that Larry Holland and Totally Games have absolutely proven themselves to be masters of that genre. We have very high hopes for it.

PCZ Will it have slightly more arcadey gameplay?

TS I'd say so, yeah. I think that if you're used to some of the elements that appeared in the originals, then I think this will have a high appeal to you. It will meet those expectations, and yet for people who haven't played those kinds of titles, there's a dynamic in the gameplay that they'll find very appealing. I've seen some very early models for some of the aircraft in the game, and they look spectacular.



Ben in *Full Throttle II*.

PCZ What can you reveal about *Full Throttle II*?

TS I do know that there will be several rival gangs in the game, and they're looking great. All the character models are superb – Ben himself particularly. We also recognise that the length of the first game was one of its shortcomings – no pun intended – and

LUCASARTS' PLANNED PC RELEASES

INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB	MARCH 2003
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	SEPTEMBER 2003
STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED	TBA
LAWRENCE HOLLAND'S WWII GAME	TBA
SAM & MAX 2	TBA
GRIM FANDANGO 2	TBA
FULL THROTTLE II	TBA
MONKEY ISLAND 5	TBA



Indy duffs up the undead.



EMULATION ZONE
Classic gaming given new life



SNIPER ELITE
Rebellion's new game announced



RAYMAN 3
The platforming Frenchie returns



PCZONE CHARTS
Latest charts and release dates

FOR LUCASARTS

LES FOR 2002 AND BEYOND. NEW GAMES AND SCREENSHOTS UNVEILED!

we're definitely going to extend this one far more than the original.

PCZ What about *Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb*? How does it differ from *Infernal Machine*?

TS It seems to me that gaming has evolved a lot in the short time since the last Indy title. For starters, there are a lot of people who like to have a greater action element. As a result, the gameplay of *Emperor's Tomb* is much more reflective of the style of the Indy films.

PCZ How exactly is LucasArts going to 'update' popular brands?

TS Unlike an established character such as Indy, when we revisit brands like *Full Throttle* and *Sam & Max*, the real challenge is to establish the same kind of credibility that a *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* game has. While these are sequels to well-loved originals, we're dealing with a different generation now and we're going to have to do a lot of work to achieve that.

We're not quite sure yet how we're going to do it with *Sam & Max 2*. We're so focused on our autumn and spring games at the



Eat lead Nazi scum!

moment that we haven't even really begun to think very seriously about what efforts we're going to need to put into it.

PCZ So *Sam & Max 2* is in development?

TS Yes, but it's very, very early days right now. However, in the next six to eight months it will really progress to the point where we can showcase it at the E3 videogames show in May and show people that it's going to be a very important part of our line-up.

PCZ Are any of the original team working on *Sam & Max 2*?

TS Actually, yes. Mike Stemmle is one of the originals. Back in the day he worked with Sean Clarke and Steve Purcell to head up the development of the first game. And that's basically Mike's role now - he's the director of the project, and it's nice to have that connection. Mike's got this absolutely wicked sense of humour - it's very subtle.

You know there's always something bubbling under the surface. And I think that's absolutely going to be played out in the next game.

PCZ Is LucasArts moving away from a point-and-click style?

TS Yeah, but how we'll do that I'm not quite sure. But I believe that, as in the original games, there will be mini-games that you can play, as well as an overall adventure.

PCZ Does LucasArts have an overall answer to the problem of how to evolve the adventure genre beyond point and click?

TS I'm not so sure that we have one overall answer that's going to make everyone happy, but I reckon it'll depend on the game and what you want the characters to do. One element may fit with one set of characters and not another. But I don't know that we have one simple formula that necessarily is going to work across all the games. But it'll be interesting to see - especially with *Sam & Max 2*.

PCZ Are there any other popular franchises that LucasArts will re-visit?

TS There'll definitely be another *Monkey Island* game. You've seen four incredibly well-done versions of *Monkey Island*, and there's an immense amount of stories that remain to be told within that series. And not only that series - I mean *Grim Fandango* especially, we'd love to revisit



that one day. Sadly, Tim Schaffer probably won't be involved, but we don't think that means the property has to suffer at all. You look at somebody like Sean Clarke, who's involved as director of *Full Throttle II*. Sean's extremely talented, and I think he'll bring an interesting perspective to *Full Throttle*, in the same way someone could do with a sequel to *Grim Fandango*. This is definitely something we want to continue to exploit as we move forward and as the emphasis on *Star Wars* games lessens, because after *Episode III*, there'll be no more *Star Wars* films.

PCZ No *Episode VII* then?

TS (laughs) No, I don't think an *Episode VII* is on George Lucas' horizon, so for LucasArts to remain competitive as a company, we need to take advantage of some of the established properties that are a part of our legacy.



Over The Rainbow

FIRST SCREENSHOT OF AMERICAN MCGEE'S NEW PROJECT OZ

RESPECTED GAMES developer American McGee has just released further details and the first images of his videogame re-interpretation of L Frank Baum's *Wizard Of Oz* books. Set in a chaotic time before the first novel, *American McGee's Oz* is a dark, third-person action-adventure that throws you into the strange Land of Oz where war is raging between the different magical races.

Wizards have murdered thousands of Munchkins with horrifically destructive spells, while the diminutive followers of the Yellow Brick Road themselves quickly retaliated by building steam-powered war machines, razing Oz and giving it the

appearance of Calais on a bad day. This is where you come in, as a human brought in by the rulers of the Realm of the Night to sort out the growing conflict like a spellcasting Kofi Annan.

McGee promises that the story will be linear, but there will be opportunities to toddle off and explore the Land of Oz, completing whichever mini-games and sub-quests you fancy. Add to that the twisted and surreal art style that made his last game *Alice* so distinctive, and *American McGee's Oz* could be a real mind-bending experience.

■ Publisher: TBC ■ Developer: Carbon6
■ ETA: 2004 ■ Website: www.carbon6.com



American McGee's Oz is a dark reworking of the famous books.

Answer: TRUE

FINAL FANTASY XI'S BENCHMARK

WILL YOUR PC BE ABLE TO RUN SQUARE'S ONLINE RPG FFXI? FIND OUT NOW!



JAPANESE COMPANY Square has released a *Final Fantasy XI* benchmark program onto the Net that allows you to test your PC for compatibility. The short demo plays music and various scenes from the forthcoming online RPG, which is set in the mystical world of Vana'diel.

The short real-time movie checks whether your PC will be powerful enough for the game to work properly. If your score is less than 1,500, then bad news – you won't be able to run *FFXI*. Between 1,500 and 3,000 means you'll just about be OK, and anything above – especially more than 4,000 – means your machine is fine to run *FFXI* in high

resolution with bump-mapping and other graphical knick-knacks.

The PC version of *FFXI Online* is out now in Japan, but Square Europe had no info on the UK release, saying it's currently concentrating on the PS2 online roll-out. However, the US release is expected sometime in 2003, so the UK shouldn't be far behind. In the meantime, download the benchmark from www.playonline.com/download/FFXiBench.zip.

- Publisher: TBC
- Developer: Square
- ETA: TBC
- Website: www.playonline.com

? TRUE OR FALSE
One episode was banned by the BBC as it showed Hutch being forcibly injected with heroin.
(answer below)

STARSKY IN THEIR EYES

THE '70S TV ICONS STARSKY & HUTCH PLAN A PC COMEBACK

FOR THE FULL impact of this news story, we recommend you to start playing '70s "wakka-wakka" funk guitar music in your head. You dig? Cool. *Starsky & Hutch* is a new action driving game based on the incredibly popular '70s US cop show that starred Paul Michael Glaser and David Soul fighting crime and corruption in the fictional Bay City.

Developer Minds Eye is ensuring that the game will capture the feel of the cult series, featuring several seedy locations such as Huggy's Bar, run by ultra-cool dude Huggy Bear. "The original actor Antonio Fargas provides the voiceover for Huggy in our story cut-scenes," says lead designer Steve Holley. "We've also got some secret goodies from The Hugster that are revealed as you progress through the game. That is, if you can take the heat on the street..."

With more than 18 missions, gamers will get the opportunity to drive the famous Zebra Three car as Starsky and pop a cap in the ass of baddies as trigger-happy Hutch in single-player or two-player co-operative

missions. "However, if you prefer, you can play unco-operatively with a friend – it doesn't help complete the mission but it sure is fun," promises Holley. With realistic car damage, high-speed chases and stunts, plus those inexplicable piles of empty cardboard boxes to run over, *Starsky & Hutch* could be worth taking for a spin when it's released early 2003 through publisher Empire.

- Publisher: Empire
- Developer: Minds Eye
- ETA: Easter 2003
- Website: www.minds-eye.net



Starsky & Hutch – cool dudes.

Feeling Blue?

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www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware/desktop



Microsoft

Foo Fighters

VIOLENT CARTOON HIGH-JINKS IN IDOL FX'S MALICIOUS MULTIPLAYER GAME FOO



A sneaky ape sets up a trap for its animal enemies.

BACK IN THE MISTS

of time (well, the '80s) Beyond Software released a ZX Spectrum title called *Spy Vs Spy*, an excellent vindictive split-screen game based on a *MAD Magazine* cartoon. Players controlled either

a black or white spy and had to set nasty booby traps, such as spring-loaded doors, to scupper each other until either one of the spies finds the all-important briefcase and escapes via plane.

Foo is a new PC title coded by Swedish developer Idol FX that uses *Spy Vs Spy* as inspiration for a completely different and twisted first-person trap 'em up set in ancient China. Using one of six cartoon animal characters (a dragon, an ape, a panda, a rabbit, a rat and a tiger), you must scoot around various ancient temples and palaces, raiding treasure and setting vindictive traps for your competitors before the time limit is up.

"*Foo* combines the malicious pleasure of letting your opponents suffer extreme cartoon-style brutality, with the stealth

of avoiding guards that'll try to catch you," says creative director Stefan Ljungqvist. "You'll have access to such weapons as the Gigantic Club, the Cannon, the Horror Mask, the Bear Trap and the Flamer, all with different animation effects. These can

either be placed in containers – such as urns, or cupboards – or combined with triggers such as tripwire."

A unique feature that gets you closer to the comedy death scenes in *Foo*, is the real-time spy cam, which allows you to watch your opponents thrash about in exaggerated agony if you manage to snare them. There'll be a total of 10 single-player levels and 10 multiplayer arenas playable across a LAN, plus a unique random level mode that will create completely new gameplay environments on the fly. We'll

have more info on *Foo* in a future PC ZONE – in the meantime, watch your back...

■ **Publisher:** Singularity Software
■ **Developer:** Idol FX
■ **ETA:** Q1 2003
■ **Website:** www.idolfx.se

"The real-time spy cam allows you to watch your opponents thrash about in agony"



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AIR RAGE



Another low level scrape over hostile territory

It's 1943 and you're 200ft above the ground, flying down the muzzles of massed anti-aircraft guns whilst dodging enemy aircraft from above to attack airfields, tanks, trucks and the rest of the enemy's arsenal. In this war there's more danger and less glory—so if it's a victory medal you want, you'll need to pick an allegiance, choose one of many authentic planes to fly and prepare yourself for an extreme mix of high altitude action to low-level flying WWII combat missions over Europe.

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EMULATION ZONE

Breaking news from the world of emulation, with retro reanimator *Stuart Campbell*



Capcom's *Giga Wing* in all its multicoloured 2D glory.



"Somebody open a window, it's hot in here."

AFFORDABLE FIREPOWER

BY AND LARGE, PC shoot 'em ups are rubbish. It's hardly a surprise though, since there's no market for them – the PC doesn't have many arcade-action fans, and the games hardly ever have real-time per-pixel bump-mapping, so they'd never sell. The rest of PCZ rather enjoys *Star Monkey* by Small Rockets, but Emu Zone thinks it's crap, and can offer no greater demonstration in support of this view than *Giga Wing*.

A 1999 Capcom coin-op also converted to the Dreamcast, *Giga Wing* doesn't look like all that much (it runs on CPS2 hardware, which is more than seven years old now), but it's one of the most important games in shoot 'em up history. In the late '90s, shoot 'em ups (or "shmups", as they're known to aficionados) had become suffocated by the never-ending growth of power-ups, to the extent where most games were ruined by a crippling imbalance between your powered-up ship and the normal one (ie get killed once and your



This would be a good time to panic.

game was effectively over, because without your accumulated power-ups you had no chance). With the invention of the 'Reflect Force' (an unlimited-use recharging shield that bounced your enemies' shots straight back at them, a

variation of which has appeared in almost every shooter since), *Giga Wing* was able to restore that balance. It created a brutally hard but totally fair game that could flood the screen with hundreds of bullets yet always leave a

skilful player a good way through the game, even with the basic un-powered-up ship. It's a glorious game, and the tricky encryption was recently cracked to enable it to be played in the excellent multi-game emulator *Nebula*, so for the sake of a 12Mb ROM download you don't have to take Emulation Zone's word for it.

Unfortunately, you can't play the definitive version of *Giga Wing* on your PC just yet, that being the Dreamcast one. For my money, the DC version is a substantially superior game, largely due to the addition of the all-important Score Attack mode. However, as most of the Dreamcast emulators out there can't even run a single game satisfactorily at the moment, you've got a wait on your hands.

In the meantime, *Giga Wing Nebula* is a superb second-best. Your trigger finger will love you for it.

LINKS

<http://nebula.emulatronia.com> – Nebula homepage

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

▲ OIDS (Atari ST/Mac, 1987-1989)

After the insane carnage of *Giga Wing*, we have something a little more sedately paced, though no less intense. FTL's *Oids* was a derivative of titles such as *Gravitar* and *Thrust*, in which you had to rescue little android workers (the eponymous Oids) from the heavily-defended slave planetoids of the Fiendish Biocretes (bit of a clue in the name, there), before they were cruelly turned into vending machines and household appliances. (No, really.) *Oids* was something of a cult almost from the day it was released, never achieving huge sales but creating a devoted and richly deserved following. It's the only game Emu Zone has ever gone to the trouble of using a construction kit for – creating five

entire galaxies full of excellent planets, homebrew fans – and it even spawned an Atari ST emulator (called Echo) which was created solely for playing *Oids*, as none of the existing emus at the time would run the game. Echo is obsolete now, but *Oids* runs beautifully in the best ST emu, SteemEngine, and it's easily the greatest use any ST emulator could be put to.

LINKS

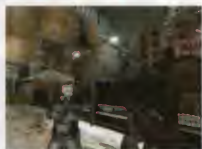
<http://www.blimey.strayduck.com> – SteemEngine homepage
http://ds.dial.pipex.com/thumbs_aloft/wos/world/scorpion/scorpion.htm – download Emu Zone's very own fantastic *Oids* galaxies



Tip: Fire the other way.

SHORTS

HELL TO PLAY



Psychotic: Gateway To Hell is a new FPS from German developer NuClear Vision and is set in 2020, when the world is being ravaged by the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Using an arsenal of 17 gut-wrenching weapons, your character, a sassy 22-year-old half-human, half-angel Angie Prophet, must slay the forces of darkness and save mankind – with a chainsaw if you wish. *Psychotic* also promises levels in psychedelic dream worlds with bizarre physics to mess with your head. CDV will publish the game in the UK Q2 2003.

360 DEGREE PC



Tsunami Visual Technologies has just launched consumer versions of its arcade system that features a 50in TV display with an acrylic ball that spins you round as you play. The Tsumo Deluxe is powered by electric motors, has a sturdy joystick and is compatible with various PC titles including Microsoft's *Crimson Skies*. The cost? A snip at £12,500. Check out www.tsunamivisual.com.

THE Y-PROJECT RESURRECTED?



The recent demise of Westka Interactive meant the good-looking FPS *The Y-Project* bit the dust. However, we recently spoke to project manager Thomas Schaefer who said that it may yet be saved. "Everybody is actually still working on it, and we have financial backing from the US. We're in a pre-Alpha stage at the moment with some playable locations, but we do need additional money soon or we won't be able to finish it." We'll keep you posted on any developments.

COMMANDER CONQUERS

FLIGHT SIM LEGEND OLEG MADDOX'S NEW WORLD WAR II: RTS REVEALED



We reckon *IL-2 Sturmovik* is the best flight sim ever, which is why we're excited about the developer's first PC RTS.

FROM PLANES to tanks, Oleg Maddox (flight sim guru behind the superb *IL-2 Sturmovik*) has started branching out. His new project is an ambitious World War II RTS with the working title of, er, *WWII: RTS*. There are platoons of similar-themed strategy games on PC out there or in development at the moment, so what makes Maddox's game different from all the others?

Well, for starters, the game uses a modified *IL-2 Sturmovik* engine (so no doubting the graphical quality) and the interface, although simple to use, hides

many complex features. *WWII: RTS* will span the entire six year-long conflict, allowing you to get in the thick of the action with British, German, French, Soviet, American and other troops, all provided with period clothing and weapons. You manage the game either from a global point of view (positioning troops, tanks etc) or on a micro scale, sending your squad into combat and watching from the bunkers in over 100 historical missions.

Also, there's going to be role-playing game elements, where your soldiers

gain experience, thus enabling special abilities such as trench clearing and tank assaulting – something the seminal *Panzer General 3D* did very well. *WWII: RTS* is already looking very special indeed, and with more than a year left for development, publisher Codemasters could well have an explosive PC title by spring 2004.

- Publisher: Codemasters
- Developer: Oleg Maddox/1C
- ETA: Spring 2004
- Website: www.codemasters.com

"WWII: RTS is already looking special"

FIGHT CLUB

THE BBC COMMISSIONS *FIGHTBOX*, A PC-BASED FIGHTING GAME/TV PROGRAMME FOR 2003

A NEW BBC project called *Fightbox* aims to combine PC games and television to produce a gladiatorial sport for 21st century techno-heads. The programme, scheduled to be shown on new digital channel BBC 3 and BBC 2 in autumn 2003, will broadcast spectacular live scraps between huge virtual characters that will have been created by gamers using free PC software.

From March, you'll be able to download the *Fightbox* game – developed by Runecraft – and start creating powerful warriors from a variety of different components including legs, arms, hair colour, weight and tattoos. There'll be a collection of heavy weaponry, such as huge mallets to arm your beastly behemoth – although the beeb is not allowing the use of guns. Boo.

Once you're satisfied with your creation, you can train them up against battle drones, scoring points that you can use to buy or trade components online with other competitors. The most lethal fighters



Fightbox software will be downloadable.

will then be invited to the BBC studios where their characters will be filmed battling it out in front of a live audience in a bid to become *Fightbox* Champion. We'll have more info on *Fightbox* and how you can get involved in a future PC ZONE.

- Publisher: BBC
- Developer: Runecraft
- ETA: Spring 2003
- Website: www.bomb.co.uk

PYRAMID SELLING

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN IN ASYLUM ENTERTAINMENT'S MUMMY-BAITING CURSE: THE EYE OF ISIS

?
TRUE OR FALSE
The Egyptians used to mummify pets and animals such as cats and dogs as well as people.
(answer below)



There are seven different weapons, including this rifle.

A **THIRD-PERSON** action game set in Egypt? Surely that's been done before? However, rather than raiding the tombs of the ancient like a certain Ms Croft, *Curse* represents something of a departure, in that you're actually returning treasure to its rightful resting place.

Kicking off in Victorian London, a priceless Egyptian statue

mysteriously disappears from the Museum of Great Britain. Not any old priceless statue, it holds an ancient and vicious curse that will be unleashed upon anyone who so much as touches it.

Fortunately, Darien Dane, a square-jawed young engineer is on hand, and aided by his able assistant, Verity Sutton, they attempt to return



A male and female character. Nothing like *Resident Evil* then.



Surely a torch would be safer?

The Eye of Isis to the pyramid whence it came. Expect zombies, mummies and paranormal phenomena in an atmospheric survival horror style epic.

- Publisher: Wanadoo
- Developer: Asylum Entertainment
- ETA: May 2003
- Website: www.cursegame.com

Good Cop. Bad Cop

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF A MONTH ON PC ZONE

GOOD COP



Getting our hands on the magnificent *Unreal II* – the only UK magazine to do so. Check out our exclusive shots on page 32.

Attending the Royal Premier of *Die Another Day*, and brushing shoulders with Halle Berry, Madonna, Pierce Brosnan and Burt Kwouk from the Pink Panther films. Cato!

Martin and Rhianna holding their own at the I-14 LAN party playing instagib UT2003. Go ZONE!

Scottish Jamie Malcolm joining our design team. Nickname: Braveart.

BAD COP

Splinter Cell slipping again. It'll be next issue for definite. Or maybe the one after...



Telewest Broadband for making Jamie Sefton miss *The Sopranos*. Hitmen have been hired.

PC ZONE's publisher getting broadband – not for playing games but so she can listen to Radio 4's *The Archers* on her PC.

The phrase "leading on Xbox". 'Nuff said.

Good Cop: George Carter Bad Cop: Jack Regan (both from *The Sweeney*). Send in your suggestions for next month's Good Cop and Bad Cop to win a prize!

Road to Berlin

SET YOUR SIGHTS ON REBELLION'S NEW WWII PROJECT *SNIPER ELITE*

"**BETTER THAN *Medal Of Honor***" is an outrageous claim to level at any game, let alone one that has only been in development for five months. Nevertheless, it's a boast that the external producer of *Sniper Elite*, Francois Coulon, casually made during a recent trip to a presentation in Paris by publisher Wanadoo. The Frenchman's insouciant comment was greeted with barely stifled guffaws from the assembled media, and he promptly fled the building, claiming that he had to go to Berlin to take pictures.

However, the WWII-themed 3D shooter does have a well-respected developer at the helm. *Sniper Elite* is being coded by Oxford-based Rebellion, the 2000AD people also currently hard at work on the promising FPS *Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death*. Set in the Spring of 1945, the Russian and Germans are squabbling over what remains of bomb-ravaged Berlin. As a recruit of the OSS (former CIA), you embark on a lonely stealth mission in the Russian territory.

A couple of innovations are already in place, such as a fluctuating heartbeat, and a function that requires you to take a deep breath to steady yourself before aiming. Berlin looks suitably wartorn, and should be even better once the producer gets back with his snaps.

"Better than *Medal Of Honor*"



Sniper Elite is set in grim, post-war Berlin.



- Publisher: Wanadoo ■ Developer: Rebellion
- ETA: Christmas 2003 ■ Website: www.rebellion.co.uk

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

GTA III FORCED the Washington Sniper to kill and kill again. That's one theory the police are considering, as they investigate the possibility that a grown man was driven to mass murder by a piece of entertainment. A detective working on the case was spotted purchasing the popular driving game, and other officers are believed to have bought a variety of violence-themed titles. They may have simply been getting in some early Christmas shopping, but president of the **Montgomery County Fraternal Order of Police**, Walt Bader, revealed: "There are thousands of things that you do in the study of criminology and it would not be unusual for investigators to look at videogames." Rent-a-quote **David Walsh**, president of the National Institute on Media and the Family, bleated: "They were smart to follow up on the possibility that the snipers were gamers because games like that mimic the kinds of actions the snipers were taking." Talking about the cryptic message daubed on a tarot card, Walsh summarised: "Gamers will often say 'I am God,' which was on the card." Indisputable proof.

Eidos has managed to offend 26 million Sikhs and faces accusations of inciting racism and hatred. **Sikhnet** called for **Hitman 2** to be withdrawn, and blasted: "In a world climate where racial and religious intolerance claims thousands of lives every day, the Sikh community is appalled by images and text in the sniper-themed videogame **Hitman 2** portraying Sikhs being killed within their most prominent temple, the Harimander Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple." Eidos responded with an apology and promptly removed all Sikh imagery from its website. It has since reached "an amicable position" with the **Sikh Coalition**, and is "taking steps to amend the game on all existing platforms."

The broadband community whipped themselves into a frenzy when an early three-level version of **Doom III** was leaked onto the intraweb. Publisher **Activision** has yet to break its silence, although a message did appear on **slashdot.org** which was supposedly from **John Carmack** of developer **id software**. He typed: "No, this was not leaked on purpose. Yes, we are upset about it, and it will have some impact on how we deal with some companies in the future, but nothing drastic is going to change in terms of what support is going to be available. Making any judgements from a snapshot intended for a non-interactive demo is ill advised."

However, a far greater crime has been committed by band **Cynic Guru**, who have recorded a pseudo-funk paean to the game simply entitled **Doom**. Unbelievable.

"They were smart to follow up on the possibility that the snipers were gamers"



Short Circuit

CODEMASTERS REVEALS DETAILS ON INDY RACING LEAGUE

TOP BRIT GAMES developer and publisher Codemasters has just announced a new racing title based on the company's newly-acquired global licence for the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Developed by Brain In A Jar, **Indy Racing League** features 15 F1-style races in 14 circuits across the USA, and incorporates the world-famous event the Indy 500.

Indy racing is seen by many as a much more exciting sport than Formula One, as it's not reliant on teams having the most money and best technology to win – all the cars are identically manufactured. This means drivers have to rely on pure skill, racing with more than 30 cars around tracks faster than 225mph, pulling off split-second manoeuvres in rivals' slipstreams to edge into the lead.

Indy Racing League promises full damage modelling for the huge (and regular!) car pile-ups, driver AI that happens in real-time for opponents that "learn" during races, and a dynamic track that reacts to weather and temperature to affect handling. Also in store for you lucky PC owners are online races with more than 16 players allowed to line up on the starting grid.

Codemasters is already launching PC versions of its two acclaimed driving games **TOCA Race Driver** and **Colin McRae Rally 3** in 2003, so with such a pedigree, and the fact that Brain In A Jar was the team behind the **Ferrari 360 Challenge** project (unfortunately aborted due to licensing issues), we expect great things from **Indy Racing League**.

■ **Publisher:** Codemasters
 ■ **Developer:** Brain In A Jar
 ■ **ETA:** May
 ■ **Website:** www.codemasters.com



? TRUE OR FALSE
 The speedway in the Indy 500 was called "The Brickyard" as the track was once paved by bricks.
 (answer below)



Yes, these are photos – screenshots are promised soon.

MASH IT UP

PLASTIC REALITY TECHNOLOGIES GO TO WAR IN KOREA: FORGOTTEN CONFLICT



Virgin Trains' rolling stock is improving.

WARGAMES are continuing their relentless assault on the PC with the announcement of a real-time strategy game based on the Korean war. **Korea: Forgotten Conflict** places you in the battle fatigues of the Allies as they battle against the Communist army over 15 historically-accurate missions in five campaigns.

Players control up to six characters, each possessing different skills such as sniper, explosives expert and medic. With access to more than 50 weapons including authentic rocket launchers, various guns and grenades, you have to plan your attack using the terrain and whatever resources are available. This includes 'acquiring' jeeps, tanks and even a steam train in a level based around Seoul railway station.



The Allies have learnt 'how not to be seen'.

By now you've probably spotted many similarities with Pyro Studios' excellent **Commandos** series, but Plastic Reality reassures us that **Korea: Forgotten Conflict** will offer enough gameplay variety to set it apart from the competition. We'll find out whether **Korea: Forgotten Conflict** will hit its targets or become a case of **Korea: The Forgotten Game** on its release through publisher **Cenega** next autumn.

■ **Publisher:** Cenega
 ■ **Developer:** Plastic Reality Technologies
 ■ **ETA:** Q3 2003
 ■ **Website:** www.cenega.com

LEGLESS IN PARIS

GUESS WHO'S BACK? HERE'S A CLUE: THE GAME IS CALLED *RAYMAN 3*



Take that, you legless French freak.



Insert your own fart-lighting gag.

WHAT'S GOT

NO arms, no legs and no neck?

Either Gladstone Small after a nasty accident, or Rayman, the titular hero of a brace of platform outings. Next year sees him star in the third instalment of the series, *Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc*, and those familiar with the previous games will know to expect an outlandish fantasy world populated by bizarre characters and featuring the best in French humour. In fact, at a recent presentation in Paris, the word 'wacky' was used no less than 13 times.

We caught up with producer Ahmed Boukhefifa, who told us: "We concentrated on going further into immersion. It's not just 'I'm playing a 3D game,' but 'I'm entering a 3D world.' A 3D action/adventure can be *GTA III*, it can be *Metal Gear Solid*, it can be *Max Payne*, it can be *Mario* or it can be *Rayman*."

Some big company there, but can *Rayman* still command an audience? According to Ahmed, most definitely: "I think Rayman is



If you're wondering, that's *Globox* on the left.

especially popular in England. In Europe he's in the top ten of recognition, so we want to develop his character. We've given him more attitude, and made him more of a funny character with his own personality." Wacky.

"Expect an outlandish fantasy world populated by bizarre characters"

- Publisher: Ubi Soft
- Developer: Ubi Soft
- ETA: March 2003
- Website: www.ubisoft.co.uk

SHORTS

BRAIN DRAIN

We've all cradled our heavy, hangover-filled heads and wished we had a new brain. Now Microsoft is working on PC software that allows you to upload letters, photographs and videos to your own personal back-up brain database, so when the old mind starts to wander, you can do a search and re-live the good times.

GANGSTER'S PARADISE



With St Valentine's Day approaching what better way to celebrate a day of love than massacring your business rivals in a bloody shootout? That's what a certain Al Capone did in 1929 Chicago, and developer Spellbound is now creating a title based on this violent prohibition era. In *Al Capone* (working title) you can play as policemen or hired goons in an isometric 3D adventure. Wanadoo will be publishing the game around Q3 2003.

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THE LAST OLAF

ROLE-PLAYING AT THE END OF THE WORLD IN *BORDERZONE*



Chickens have evolved somewhat by the year 9000.

IN 9000AD, it's safe to say Earth will be a different place – apart from a few recognisable features such as the great oceans and Rolling Stones concerts. *BorderZone* (working title) is an action RPG from developer Saturn Plus, it's set in the future and throws one of the last remaining humans, Olaf, into a quest to find his fate.

"*BorderZone* is a unique blend of RPG and hack 'n' slash," says PR manager of the Russian publisher 1C Company. "There'll be a comprehensive non-linear plot that will ensure the player won't get bored with similar titles that have an endless killing of monsters and nothing else."

"*BorderZone* is a unique blend of RPG and hack 'n' slash"



Fight animated skeletons – a Ray Harryhausen tribute perhaps?

You play as Olaf, and can choose to be a thief, a soldier or a magician, each of which has different weapons and magical powers. Olaf can form a band of up to 10 mercenaries in order to progress through the 300-location adventure, and is tasked with taking on the various monsters and undead creatures that have roamed Earth

since the mysterious catastrophe 'The Collapse' – which caused massive destruction about 7000 years ago. We should have a preview very soon.

■ Publisher: TBC
■ Developer: Saturn Plus
■ ETA: TBC



"No-one has ever called me a cool dude. I'm somewhere between geek and normal."

Linus Torvalds, creator of the Linux operating system, comes clean

"I set out consciously to try to depict not just the community and the sub-culture, but also the slang terms and language growing up around it."

Novelist and gamer Christopher Brookmyre about the Quake III references and id tribute in his book *A Big Boy Did It And Ran Away*

"When I find a hotel doesn't have ADSL, it's like 'What? There's no toilet?' Once you get to high-speed you ain't going back."

Actor Robin Williams confesses his love for online gaming. A Patch Adams FPS is apparently not in the works

"A mouse can be just as dangerous as a bullet or a bomb."

Republican Lamar Smith, sponsor of the Cyber Security Enhancement Act, which if approved could jail computer hackers in the USA for life

Snooker Loopy

POT BLACK IN BLADE INTERACTIVE'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP SNOOKER 2003

A NEW INSTALMENT of Codemasters' excellent snooker franchise is about to break. Developed by Blade Interactive, *World Championship Snooker 2003* features TV-style camera views of the green baize action, with accurate ball physics and a new AI system for more intelligent computer-controlled opponents.

As well as highly-detailed player models, the game boasts photo-realistic snooker balls, tables and venues, even going so far as having particle chalk dust effects as you make shots and leaving chalk marks on the felt for the duration of a match.



Drinking mini-games aren't included.

We heard a rumour you'll even be able to see minute drips of condensation forming on Alex Higgins' tenth pint of lager.

PC ZONE's current favourite cue-wielding sim is Interplay's *Virtual Pool 3*, but *World Championship Snooker 2003* could rival it by introducing English and American pool games of its own as a free bonus. All that's

missing is the digitised figure of popular ex-snooker referee Len Ganley, but who knows, he might even manage an appearance in the game before its release next spring.

■ Publisher: Codemasters
■ Developer: Blade Interactive
■ ETA: Spring 2003
■ Website: www.bladeinteractive.com



Feel the excitement.

? TRUE OR FALSE
The legendary Jimmy White has never actually had a 147 break in a major snooker competition.
(answer below)

SIEGE MENTALITY

EXCLUSIVE DETAILS ON PRIMAL SOFTWARE'S CASTLE-BUSTING REAL-TIME STRATEGY *BESIEGER*

A NEW TITLE from Russian developer Primal Software could be about to bring the walls of the RTS genre crashing down. *Besieger* is a full 3D war of attrition, where you have to break through into seemingly-impregnable enemy settlements, or defend your own cities from vastly superior forces.

"It's difficult to say something new in the strategy genre while keeping the game fun," says managing director Petr Petoukov.

"However, one of the things that always gets overlooked is besieging towns. In most games you just prepare a rush with as

many units as you can. Our title is more involving, so you can employ a huge amount of different strategies."

Players take command of one of two medieval races, the Vikings and Cimmerians, each with its own units, buildings, unique characters and natural resources of wood, stone and metal. These are used to build settlements and weapons, which include exploding barrels, battering rams, arbalests and even flying ships.

"You have two heroes who lead their armies through 40 missions that gradually

unfold the plot," continues Petoukov.

"There's even a time twist where you'll get to see the same set of events from the eyes of both races." *Besieger* will feature LAN and online multiplayer options on its release in the UK, which, depending on a publishing deal, should happen in the first half of 2003.

- **Publisher:** TBC
- **Developer:** Primal
- **ETA:** Q2 2003
- **Website:** www.besieger.com



Primal want the equivalent of a history film with live actors. Graphics are in full 3D with support for next-gen cards.

"It's difficult to say something new in the strategy genre while keeping the game fun to play"



WARHAMMER DON'T HURT 'EM

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER ACTION IN THE WARHAMMER 40K UNIVERSE WITH *FIRE WARRIOR*

TABLE-TOP BATTLES are being dragged into the 21st century with the announcement of Kuju's 3D shooter *Fire Warrior*. Based on the Tau troops from the popular *Warhammer 40,000* franchise by Games Workshop, *Fire Warrior* throws gamers into a violent fantasy world populated with brutal space marines and other races fighting for dominance.

Kuju has been working closely with Games Workshop to produce *Warhammer 40K*-approved sound effects for the game, plus 15 weapons (many of them unique), including gun drones, powerful blasters equipped with jetpacks for striking deep in enemy territory, and melta guns, which fire superheated gas plasma at close range.

The player will follow the narrative of main character Kais as he annihilates foes, solves puzzles and yomps with additional AI-controlled fire warriors through scary and atmospheric locations on exotic planets and spaceships. *Fire Warrior* will also have an extensive online multiplayer mode where gamers can play as one of the many *Warhammer* tribes, including the popular space marines. We'll have more info soon.

- **Publisher:** THQ
- **Developer:** Kuju
- **ETA:** May 2003
- **Website:** www.kuju.com



Genestealer aliens are rumoured to appear in *Fire Warrior*.



Randy Pitchford,
President of Gearbox Software

DEVELOPERS' QUESTION TIME

What PC games are you playing at the moment?

Halo PC (grin), Unreal Tournament 2003, Battlefield 1942 - I'm also still playing *Worms* and *Doom II* via LAN when the urge hits around here.

What was the last videogame you finished?

Warcraft III - good stuff.

What is your favourite game of all time?

It's a tie between *Doom II* and *NetHack* - judging primarily by hours logged playing them.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Accepting the Academy of Interactive Arts and Sciences award for PC Action Game of the Year for *Opposing Force* in 2000 was a very proud moment for myself and Gearbox.

Who do you most admire in the industry and why?

I most admire my partners and the team at Gearbox Software - the guys at Gearbox love what they do - they all trust each other and build off of each other.

What has the PC contributed most to videogaming?

PCs are videogaming. All game developers, console and PC alike, learned their craft on their PCs and utilise their PCs to create. The Personal Computer is the only universal tool of game development.

What is your company's philosophy?

I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you. Our philosophy is what has helped us be exceptionally prolific. I'm amazed when I look back to see what Gearbox has accomplished over the last four years.

What's the best thing about your job?

Finishing something I'm proud of. When I'm at the store and I see someone buy one of our games it's great - there's no way to describe that feeling.

What's the worst thing about your job?

Unfortunately, sometimes we must work with folks who aren't as sharp or that don't "get it". Whether these guys have worked with our business partners or have actually been at Gearbox, it's still something that has to be dealt with and corrected. In an ideal world, everyone would be stellar. The real world is more complex and solutions aren't always simple.

What are you currently working on?

I'm spending most of my time in pre-production on a new title - something that's really important for Gearbox. Unfortunately, it's not the right time to discuss it.

What's the Next Big Thing in PC gaming?

Surround Smell-O-Vision 3D with Dynamic Scent Control (DSC). Look it up - all of the well-known hardware vendors are ramping up for it.

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack

TOP 10



"We shall not be moved!" sing the The Sims in unison, hogging the top spot for a second month. Will Wright's greatest creations also retain the number four and number nine slots for the *Deluxe Edition* and *On Holiday* add-on pack respectively.



Age of Mythology, last month's exclusive PC ZONE cover disc demo, has gone straight in at number two. In *AoM* you have to create settlements and armies to battle Greek, Roman and Norse beasts in another superb RTS from Ensemble.

	TITLE	PUBLISHER	SCORE
1	- THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA	78%
2	NEW AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT	90%
3	NEW HARRY POTTER: COS	EA	74%
4	- THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	EA	N/A
5	NEW FIFA 2003	EA	80%
6	NEW THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR	BLACK LABEL	54%
7	NEW COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3	MICROSOFT	82%
8	▼ ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES	80%
9	- THE SIMS: ON HOLIDAY	EA	66%
10	▼ TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2003	EA	77%



Hogwarts' finest has apparated into third place. We'll have to wait and see if *Chamber of Secrets* has the staying power of a Quidditch champion until after the Christmas period, when the hype of Warner's blockbuster movie will have died down.



This Black Label RPG is still making a decent showing at number six. *The Fellowship Of The Ring* is based on Tolkien's book and although it looks nice enough and you can play as Gandalf, the gameplay is strictly mundane, by-the-numbers RPG fare.

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

"New *FIFA* not debuting at number one? That's a surprise. Look at all the EA published titles. Christmas is always EA's time of year but this year they are, dare I say it, too dominant."
Glen02

"Pretty much all sequels and not much new. Are developers running out of ideas at last?"
Rich

Nice to see *AoM* in there – looks like another great game from Ensemble. People still buying *The Sims* is a catastrophe, surely they can't be buying the *Deluxe Edition* too? Do they realise that it's not a different game?
benjstevo



TOP 10

1	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
2	COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3	MICROSOFT
3	HARRY POTTER: COS	EA
4	THE LORD OF THE RINGS: TFOTR	BLACK LABEL
5	FIFA 2003	EA
6	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
7	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
8	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003	INFOGRAMES
9	MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
10	MAFIA	TAKE 2

COMPETITION



Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, PC ZONE and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10. All you have to do to enter the draw is answer the following simple question:

QUESTION: How many Harry Potter books have been written so far by author JK Rowling?

Answers on a postcard to: PC ZONE Chart Compo (CPCZ01A), Dennis Publishing, PO Box 154, Bradford BD1 5RZ. Closing date: January 9 2003

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to PC ZONE.

Terms and conditions: winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply.

INCOMING!

SAY HELLO TO OUR RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS, BUT WE'D CHECK AHEAD BEFORE MERRILY RUNNING DOWN TO THE SHOPS IN THE DRIVING RAIN

DECEMBER

MOH: AA - SPEARHEAD EA

JANUARY

IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES MICROSOFT
SIMCITY 4 EA
SPLINTER CELL UBI SOFT
THE SIMS: ONLINE EA
UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING INFOGRAMES

FEBRUARY

AMERICAN CONQUEST CDV
ANNO 1503 EA
BREATH OF FIRE IV CAPCOM
CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4 EIDOS
CHASER JOWOOD
COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS EA
DARK AGE OF CAMELOT WANADOO
DINO CRISIS 2 CAPCOM
GROM CDV
HIGHLAND WARRIORS NOVALOGIC
IGI 2 - COVERT STRIKE CODEMASTERS
INQUISITION WANADOO
PORT ROYALE BIG BEN
PRAETORIANS EIDOS
RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD UBI SOFT
SILENT HILL 2: INNER FEARS KONAMI
TOCA RACE DRIVER CODEMASTERS
TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS EIDOS
VIETCONG TAKE 2
WARRIOR KINGS - BATTLES EMPIRE

MARCH

AQUANOX 2: REVELATION JOWOOD
BLITZKRIEG CDV
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3 CODEMASTERS
COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO VU GAMES
CRUSADERS - BATTLE FOR OUTREMER WANADOO
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN NOVALOGIC
DEVASTATION HD INTERACTIVE
ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS OXYGEN
FREELANCER MICROSOFT
INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB ACTIVISION
IRU: TALES FROM THE EDGE OF THE WORLD MICROIDS
JURASSIC PARK: OPERATION GENESIS VU GAMES
METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE KONAMI
POST MORTEM MICROIDS
RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC UBI SOFT
REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION EIDOS
RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY ACTIVISION
STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II ACTIVISION
THE GREAT ESCAPE SCI
TRON 2.0 DISNEY
WILL ROCK UBI SOFT

TBA

ABDUCTED TBC
DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR EIDOS
DUKE NUKEM FOREVER TAKE 2
EARTH AND BEYOND EA
GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY TAKE 2
HALF-LIFE 2 VU GAMES
MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER EA
MAX PAYNE 2 TAKE 2
PLANETSIDE UBI SOFT
QUAKE IV ACTIVISION
THIEF 3 EIDOS

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

FALCONE: INTO THE MAELSTROM

AN ECLECTIC mix of space combat and FPS, *Falcone: Into The Maelstrom* has now been consigned to consoles. Using Epic's *Unreal* engine, Falcone gave you the choice of being one of two warring pirate factions, stealing precious booty (no, not that kind).

■ Publisher: Virgin
■ Developer: Point Blank
■ ETA: K.I.A.
■ Website: www.virgininteractive.com



BREED



ORIGINALLY PENCILLED in for a Christmas 2002 release, Brat Designs' *FPS Breed* has been put back until mid-2003. But from what we've seen so far, it should be worth the wait. Find out more in our 2003 preview special on page 56.

■ Publisher: CDV
■ Developer: Brat Designs
■ ETA: Q2 2003
■ Website: www.brat-designs.com

GALLEON: ISLANDS OF MYSTERY

TOBY GARD, once a key member of the Core Design team who invented Lara Croft, has pulled the plug on the PC version of his new project. *Galleon: Islands Of Mystery* is a swashbuckling 3D adventure featuring dashing explorer Captain Rhama and his spectacular acrobatics. Confounding Factor is now bringing the game exclusively to Xbox.

■ Publisher: Interplay ■ Developer: Confounding Factor
■ ETA: K.I.A. ■ Website: www.confounding-factor.com



US TOP 10

1	THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
2	AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
3	THE SIMS: DELUXE	EA
4	ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2	INFOGRAMES
5	BACKYARD HOCKEY	INFOGRAMES
6	COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 3	MICROSOFT
7	ZOO TYCOON: MARINE MANIA	MICROSOFT
8	EVERQUEST: PLANES OF POWER	UBI SOFT
9	CIVILIZATION III: PLAY THE WORLD	INFOGRAMES
10	THE SIMS: VACATION	EA

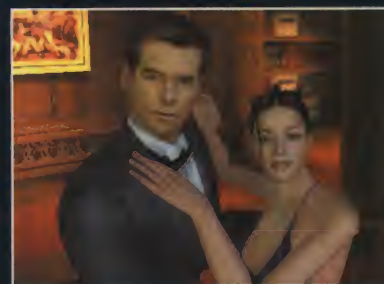


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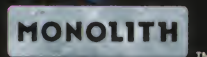
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THE BEST...

GAMES OF 2003

PREVIEWS SPECIAL

INTRODUCING
THE PC ZONE
EXCITRONOMETER™

EXCITRONOMETER™

IT'S EXCITING!

SO IT'S ALMOST that time of year again, eh?. 2002's all but breathed its last, and soon enough we'll be singing *Auld Lang Syne* over a mug of lukewarm eggnog. It's time to take stock, make some resolutions to break after two and a half weeks, decide what to do with all the Burtons vouchers you got for Christmas, and look forward to another year of wondrous gaming delights.

And we'd have to say that the next 12 months are going to be the biggest ever for PC gaming. We've got a new *Unreal*, a new *Deus Ex*, a new *C&C*. The true next generation of online role-players will arrive and graphical standards will leap to

levels we didn't think we'd witness in our meagre lifespans. And that's not even mentioning what it has in store for us.

To help you prepare for the astronomical year ahead, **PC ZONE** has prepared the definitive guide to 2003's most compelling and exciting PC games, hand-picked by our team of gaming experts... Along with a couple the cleaners suggested. We've fed them into our brand new invention, the new **PC ZONE Excitronometer™** and collated the results. If you don't agree with the readouts, too bad. Write a letter. But in the meantime, brace yourself, check your kecks, and bask in the radiance of... The Definitive **PC ZONE 101 Games Of 2003**.

American Conquest	51	Ghost Master	62	Savage	57
Asheron's Call 2: Fallen Kings	70	Gothic 2	59	Sea Dogs 2	59
Black & White 2	61	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	64	Shade	55
Blitzkrieg	49	Halo	39	Shadow Of Memories	55
Bloodrayne	55	Hidden & Dangerous 2	57	Shadowbane	71
Breed	56	Highland Warriors	51	Shining Lore	68
Broken Sword:		Homeworld 2	46	Silent Hill 2: Inner Fears	55
The Sleeping Dragon	55	IL-2: Forgotten Battles	65	SimCity 4	62
Championship Manager 4	60	Imperium Galactica 3	48	Spellforce	51
Chaser	42	Indiana Jones And The		Splinter Cell	53
Chrome	45	Emperor's Tomb	52	Stalker: Oblivion Lost	40
City Of Heroes	71	Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death	40	Star Trek: Elite Force II	44
Colin McRae Rally 3	64	Kingdom Under Fire:		Star Wars Galaxies	68
Command & Conquer: Generals	47	The Crusaders	51	Star Wars:	
Commandos 3	47	Kreed	41	Knights Of The Old Republic	58
Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars	51	Laser Squad Nemesis (Retail)	51	SWAT: Urban Justice	57
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	38	Last Ninja: The Return	55	The Great Escape	55
Crusaders: Battle For Outremer	48	Lionheart	59	The Movies	62
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	56	Lineage II:		The Sims 2	62
Deus Ex 2: The Invisible War	59	The Chaotic Chronicle	71	The Sims Online	71
Devastation	41	Lock On	65	Thief III	53
Doom III	38	Lula 3D	55	TOCA Race Driver	64
Dragon Empires	71	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	53	Tomb Raider:	
Driver 3	64	Master Of Orion 3	48	The Angel Of Darkness	54
Duality	54	Max Payne 2	45	Tron 2.0	41
Duke Nukem Forever	45	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	53	UFO: Aftermath	51
Earth & Beyond	71	Phantom Crash	45	Unreal II: The Awakening	32
Echelon: Wind Warriors	65	Planetside	70	Unreal Tournament 2004	45
Elite 4	67	Postal 2	45	Vietcong	44
Enter The Matrix	28	Praetorians	50	Warlords IV	51
EVE: The Second Genesis	71	Quake IV	45	Warrior Kings: Battles	50
EverQuest 2	69	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	57	World of Warcraft	69
Far Cry	42	Republic: The Revolution	61	X2: The Threat	67
Final Fantasy XI Online	71	Return To Castle Wolfenstein:		Xenus	45
Firestarter	41	Enemy Territory	42	XIII	42
Freelancer	67	Rise Of Nations	48	Yager	65

101 GAMES OF 2003

ENTER THE MATRIX



"You have to let it all go - fear, doubt, disbelief. Free your mind... Now you go first, I've got a bad back."

All the major locations from the films are lovingly recreated.

Down the rabbit hole we go...

ENTER THE

CV

SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

Recently celebrating its 9th anniversary, California-based Shiny has led a charmed existence, going from one critical smash to another. But it all started with the adventures of a hamster-riding maggot back in 1994...

1994 Shiny's debut title, platform adventure *Earthworm Jim* is released for the Sega Genesis. The quirky annelidan hero is rapturously received and soon becomes a gaming icon, with his own TV series no less. A sequel follows a year later.

1996 Shiny makes its PC debut with *MDK*. It's another quirky, humour-filled adventure and goes on to sell over half a million copies.

2000 After a couple of likable console outings in *Wild9* and *R/C Stunt Copter*, Shiny returns to the PC with the wildly original, wildly ambitious and wildly delayed *Messiah*. PC ZONE likes.

2000 Multi-player RTS *Sacrifice* is released just in time for Christmas.

2002 While beaver away intently on the coveted *Matrix* licence, Shiny is acquired by French publishing giant Infogrames. Everyone gets fat.

I'm going to write this preview, and show these people what they want to see. I'm going to show them a world without rules or controls. I am Martin Korda. This is the preview

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Shiny
PUBLISHER Infogrames
WEBSITE www.shiny.com
OUT May 15 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the game of your favourite film of 2003
- One entire hour of footage shot just for the game, with all the actors from the films
- A storyline that extends the *Matrix* universe, written by the Wachowskis
- All-action blend of shooting, fighting, hacking and driving
- You can "Bend The Rules" in combat - walk up walls, hang in the air, etc

YOU THINK this is a magazine you're reading now? You think that's ink forming the words on this page? You think that chair/sofa/bog seat you're sitting on is real? What if I told you that everything you know, everything you believe, everything you think... is a lie, a fake? The people you care for, the job you hate and your inexplicable love of

knew existed? If you answered yes to the first question, then you need to meet a man who can show you this other way, a man who will take you away from your daily routine, who will show you an alternative you never knew you had. An escape from your everyday, cardboard world, into one of action and thrills. If it's this that you seek, then come with me

"The way they've designed it, you have to play our game as well as seeing the movies to get the entire *Matrix* story"

Home & Away? What if none of it was real? What if none of it mattered?

Would you look me in the (virtual) eye and plead with me to show you an alternative world, or would you shrug with unashamed resignation at your pitiful lot, turning your back on an option that could unravel mysteries you never

now, and meet the man who can answer all your questions.

WELCOME TO ANOTHER WORLD

Allow me to introduce you to David Perry, one of the true greats of the gaming industry, who has just spent the last two years of his life working with the

**WORLD'S
FIRST
SHOTS!**

ENTER THE MATRIX



According to Dave Perry, Niobe is a "hard-as-nails ass-kicker." Sadly, he was unable to set us up on a date.



MATRIX

ETA
May 15
2003

Wachowski Brothers on one of the most eagerly anticipated games ever, third-person action/adventure *Enter The Matrix*.

Sitting in front of me with a concentrated look in his eyes, his face is a tapestry of emotions, lined by two years of sleep deprivation but lit up by a love of games that hasn't diminished over the last decade. He sees my eagerness to begin and pre-empts me with a question of his own, "You want to know whether this game will be as ground-breaking as the movie, don't you?" I nod in shame at my own predictability, but Dave has clearly been wanting to spill the beans on his baby for a long time now, and he is already off and running: "The way we're handling motion capture, the animation, the fighting system - there's so many instances here where we've developed our own tools and technologies specifically for this game, and this is why

it's going to be ground-breaking on so many different levels. Without access to the people we've had access to, it would cost a competitor about 75 million pounds to make a game like this - with motion capture, a new fighting system, 3D gun fights, driving, flying, hacking, real acting, real music, real movie footage. On PC, it's currently taking up six CD-ROMS. I think people will feel that it's extremely fresh and they'll certainly get their money's worth."

BREATHLESS

An impressive start indeed. Catching my breath after this onslaught of information, I ask Dave to tell me more about the kind of gameplay we can expect come May 15, the day the game must and will be released (to coincide with the release of the next film, *The Matrix Reloaded*). "The game has all the *Matrix* action you can take - martial arts, guns, driving, insane stunts. You'll "bend

the rules" just like Neo and Trinity did in the first movie - running on walls, dodging bullets and making huge leaps and kicking ass when a situation demands it."

Of course, having innovative ideas and great source material to work with is one thing, but as we know only too well, developers have often been creatively hamstrung when working with big-budget film licences, especially when it comes to the plot. I share my worries with Dave, who quickly puts my mind at ease. "The game's script was actually written by the Wachowski brothers, and the storyline is



101 GAMES OF 2003

ENTER THE MATRIX



Niobe narrowly avoids being crushed by a giant sign.



Guns... lots of guns.



One... Two... Electric Boogaloo.

really unique, with the game story intertwined with the films – events in the game affect the film, and vice versa. The way they have designed it, you have to play our game, and watch the animés as well as seeing both movies to get the entire *Matrix* story."

TAKE THE RED PILL

This is where the revelation begins. The Wachowskis haven't just created a cool film and a game to go with it – they've created a complex and coherent universe that inhabits many media and has a life far beyond the experience of sitting in a darkened room watching a strip of images flicker on a wall. *The Animatrix* – a collection of short animé films set in the *Matrix* universe, each with a very different take on the concept – is one extension of the *Matrix* array. Shiny's game, far from your average thrown-together film spin-off, is another, crucial part of that array.

It's hard not to think that with the Wachowski's vision in place, *Enter The Matrix* is set to be the greatest film-licensed game of our time. The interweaving plot linking with that of the films will inject it with a level of immersion and significance rarely seen in a videogame, while the gameplay is set to offer more diversity than ten of its competitors.

But with a simultaneous PC, GameCube, Xbox and PS2 release in plan, isn't there a chance that PC owners will be saddled with another massively console-oriented title? Not so, says Dave, who explains that Shiny's ground-breaking cross-platform engine was designed from the ground up to use every machine to its full potential. "Every minute spent making the game causes the results to appear on all four platforms. No matter what platform you're using, the game engine is squeezing every last bit of performance

out of the hardware. The versions will all feel the same when you play, but there will be graphical differences due to the different types of hardware you're using. This technology means that if you buy the latest ATI or NVIDIA card, our engine already knows how to use it to its full. The only major control change is by using a mouse on the PC. I just wish all consoles had a mouse controller, too."

I WANT TO BE NEO

For a while, our conversation meanders around an already touched-on subject – the plot – while the room grows darker and rain assaults the windowpanes like giant strands of wire. As if sensing that the setting somewhat mirrors a scene from the film, Dave pulls out the most apt quote of the evening. "No one can be told what *Enter The Matrix* is..." I smile knowingly. "Let's just say that the game's plot is closely intertwined with *The Matrix Reloaded*, which picks up right where *The Matrix* left off. Zion is under a great threat, and everyone – Neo, Trinity, Morpheus, Niobe and Ghost – must all race against time to save Zion and ultimately mankind itself." There's some info for all you film lovers then, but shockingly, *Enter The Matrix* will not allow you to play the role of any character from *The Matrix*.

Yep, you read right. You can't be Neo. Or Morpheus. Or Trinity. But surely, if it's to capture the true spirit of the films, *Enter The Matrix* must allow you to be the heroes already immortalised in our

minds? Playing a new character with no background or history other than that explored within the game will surely come as a gargantuan disappointment to fans the world over. Dave disagrees. And not without good reason. "All the major characters from the first film are present in the game, but you'll play as either Niobe or Ghost, two new characters who appear in *The Matrix Reloaded*. Niobe is a hard-as-nails ass-kicker (or bottom-kicker as you would call it in Blighty)." Clearly Dave has spent little time in the UK of late. "She's the best driver in the game. Ghost is the weapons guru – think of him as a Zen-Buddhist-Apache-Assassin." So you get to play characters from the second film eh? Who will very soon be as beloved by us as any from the original film? I stand corrected.

INTERACTIVE CINEMA

As time pushes on and the rain subsides to a redundant dribble, I usher Dave down the road of narrative presentation. Cut-scenes and plot details can be a fickle friend to action games, often turning the emphasis away from the conflict to the point of boredom. It's a relief to see that Dave holds many of the same plot-based ideals as I do. "I don't mind being interrupted by cut-scenes if it's cool and interesting stuff I'm about to see. I thought some of the *Metal Gear Solid 2* cut-scenes were mind-numbingly boring to watch; they droned on and on. The problem it suffered from

CAN I KICK IT?

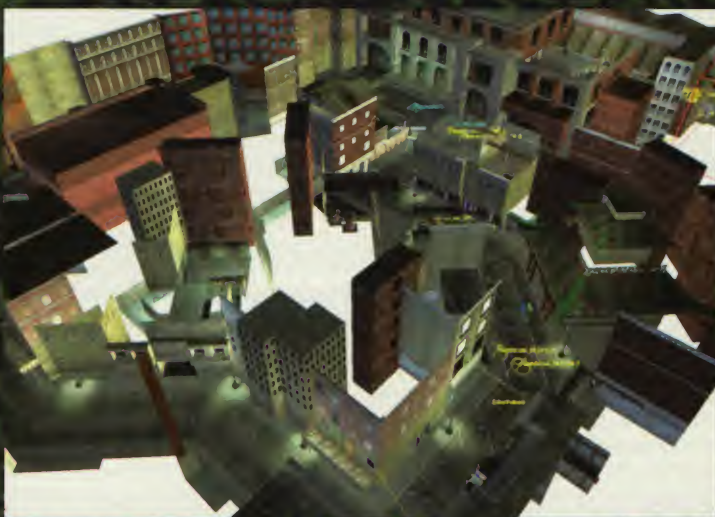
YES YOU CAN. IN SLOW-MOTION, UPSIDE DOWN, SUSPENDED IN MID-AIR

No *Matrix* game would be complete without the recreation of the superb fight scenes of the film. Of course, this complex system, where you can 'bend the rules' is no easy feat to implement into a game. But when you have Master Yuen Wo Ping (the martial arts legend behind the film's gravity defying choreography) working with you, then you're certainly in with a bloody good chance of pulling it off. However, no information has been forthcoming from Shiny regarding the use of 'Bullet Time' slo-mo effects in the game, although I suspect that comments about 'bending the rules' could be a veiled way of talking about the subject. "Just like the film, we wanted the player to be able to run up a wall, nail two guys with a flying kick, somersault across the floor and pick up a pistol in the same motion, shoot two more guys, then judo throw another guy over the edge of rooftop. And we've got all of that in the game and more than 3,000 other moves," enthuses Dave. *Max Payne*, eat you heart out.

I was going to make a joke here about prancing, somersaulting pansies, but decided against it as Master Yuen might get wind of it and kill me with his thumb. So probably best I just let this one go, eh?



Pull off all the moves you've seen in the film and a whole load more.



Check out the size of the environments – they're big aren't they?



You don't play as Neo, but as two new characters from *The Matrix Reloaded*.



Don't waste your bullets, we're just gonna pluck 'em out of the air like grapes.

was that some of them were cool, some were even important, and far, far, far too many were complete ass, err, I mean 'bottom'." Stop that. "But you could never tell when you needed to pay attention and when it would be better to just get up and go and get a beer from the fridge. With *Enter the Matrix*, there is an hour of original motion picture footage shot just for the game, using the real actors, the real sets and directed by the Wachowskis themselves. If you are a *Matrix* fan, you just can't miss it." And with that I am convinced. Utterly and totally. The Wachowskis have broken dramatically with the tradition of film-makers – not only by working closely with the developers to ensure the game meets the same superb quality of the films, but by actually making the game an essential complement to those films. The one hour of FMV footage will be worth the entrance fee alone.

HE IS THE ONE

As the conversation rolls to a halt with the customary exchange of pleasantries, Dave Perry can surely not miss the excitement on my face, betrayed by an idiotic smile usually reserved exclusively for the mentally unsound. He's shown me that there is another world out there, one of adventure, intrigue, subterfuge and danger, one waiting to be discovered come May 15, which will take me – and you – away from our daily grind, fading our predictable and stagnant existence to a shadowy memory, till it disappears and becomes little more than a dream.

Prepare yourself then for a brave new world, prepare yourself to *Enter The Matrix*. [X]

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



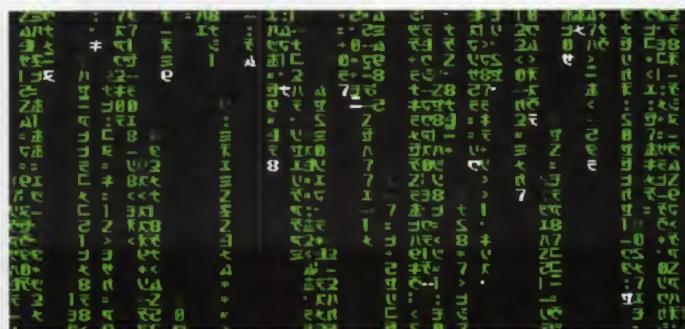
"Run up a wall, nail two guys with a flying kick, somersault and pick up a pistol all in the same motion"

DAVE PERRY CEO OF SHINY ENTERTAINMENT

HACKED OFF

JUST FOLLOW THE WHITE RABBIT AND YOU'LL BE FINE

One of the most interesting and unique aspects of *Enter The Matrix* is set to be its hacking options. In typically post-modern form, the game will try to convince you that you're not playing a game at all, but actually sitting at your computer, hacking into the Matrix to uncover its secrets. Confused? Well maybe Dave can make more sense of it for you. "Hacking is like a game-within-a-game, where you can hack into your character and the game console. As it emulates you sitting at a computer, that section feels somewhat like a text adventure (from the good old gaming days). You'll find secrets and unlock all sorts of goodies. You can download new skills into your character, and feel like you are really hacking. For example, in the first movie, Trinity writes "KNOCK KNOCK" on Neo's monitor. We do the same, but you can interact with her, and with her help, keep digging deeper into the system." Clearer now?



Worryingly, our resident egghead Steve Spence can actually read this.

101
GAMES
OF
2003

Wake up and
smell the future

UNREAL II: THE AWAKENING

This is your pilot.
You poor sod.

ETA
Spring
2003

Mark Hill rubs his eyes
and pinches himself after
seven hours playing a game
that will make history

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Legend Entertainment

PUBLISHER Infogrames

WEBSITE www.unreal2.com

OUT January 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's only one of the most anticipated shooters ever
- Incredible visuals
- Full of variety
- Proper story with dialogue options and everything
- No multiplayer mode to dilute the talent

I MUST BE the only person in the industry who still thinks *Half-Life* is unsurpassed as a shooter. This is not just nostalgia talking. I still go back to it now and again to see how it's holding up against the latest contenders. Oh, I know it was graphically surpassed ages ago, and there have been shooters with better enemy AI and with more fleshed out characters and better developed stories since. But it's how the whole experience hangs together that matters, and in that sense nothing comes close. Not the scattered epic grandeur of *Medal Of Honor*, not the touches of tension and originality of *Aliens Vs Predator 2*, not the highly challenging and intelligent firefights of *Soldier Of Fortune 2*.

Of course, this is the bit where I tell you that *Unreal II* could be the game to beat it. The difference this time is that I'm not basing that statement on a few screenshots, a quick demo and an interview – all of which are designed to show a new title in its best light. I'm basing it on seven solid hours of gameplay. Seven hours during which I

CV

LEGEND
ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY

LEGEND CV

Founded in 1989, these boys have got bags of experience and 19 games to their name. Here are some of the highlights.

1994 After years of text adventures they produce *Superhero League Of Hoboken*, a nutty crossbreed of graphic adventure and RPG. Better than *Freedom Force*.

1998 In the same year they hit the big time by getting the job for the *Unreal* add-on pack *Return To Na Pali*, they produced the *Myst*-style adventure *John Saul's Blackstone Chronicles*, based on the horror writer's series of books.

1999 They return to the *Unreal* engine with the original but not entirely successful *The Wheel Of Time* adding magic and RPG touches.



was enraptured by organic landscapes, thrown back in my seat by the virulent force of the action, astonished by the variety of interaction, weaponry and mission structures, and engaged by an intergalactic tale that still has time for complex characters.

WHOLE-LIFE

During a break from the action to down a glass of water, trying to stop my adrenaline-fuelled shakes from spilling it, I asked project director and main designer Glen Dahlgren if he thought *Half-Life* was still the benchmark for new shooters.

"It was a real jump," he concedes. "It added depth when there wasn't any. But if you look at its story, it's paper-thin, and a lot of the games that have come since have gone a lot deeper, adding characters with personalities. That is the expectation now, so I don't think *Half-Life* is the one to beat anymore – in my mind at least." And he has no doubts that in *Unreal II* Legend has something

"It's hard to describe a typical *Unreal II* mission, because there isn't one"



There are loads of planets to explore and they all look different.



Indoors has been done to death, it's the outside spaces that impress in *Unreal II*.

that will beat anything currently on the market.

"We've improved it in several ways. Obviously the storyline, and in the variety of the missions. You defend areas against assault, you escort VIPs and so on. And graphically it's superb." But doesn't he think the FPS needs to move on from the 'go down a corridor, press a button, kill everything' mindset?

"That's kind of the core of these games and they're all going to have that. But we have a conversation tree, other people have vehicles in there, we have more advanced physics... Things are

going to come from more engaging stories, that's what brings things to life. And Legend knows about stories. We made text adventures back in the day. I find it interesting that *Half-Life* was bringing just a touch of what was in an adventure game into first-person shooters, and I was like: 'Yes, of course that's the way things should go!' The puzzles in *Unreal II* aren't confounding, you'll never get stuck, but you'll be doing cool things and feeling like you're always making progress. And with your crew you're always getting new information. Whenever we feel the player is in trouble, there's Aida to help you out."

That reminds me: I should return to the fray. There's still so much to see,

so much to do. And I can't wait to start playing again.

LONG LIVE SINGLE-PLAYER

It's hard to describe a typical *Unreal II* mission, because there isn't one. The way it challenges you is not just by relentless assaults from enemies that are either trying to outsmart you (the human end of the scale) or simply overrun you (the scaly end of the scale). It's by the sheer diversity of demands it asks of you and experiences it throws you into.

One minute you feel like you're playing some wonderful sci-fi version of *Project IGI*, infiltrating a base set in a vast expanse of terrain and picking off soldiers with a sniper rifle. The next you're in *AvP2*, creeping along claustrophobic corridors and screaming at the sight of a giant arachnid creature stampeding towards you. Later you could be relaxing on your ship, talking to your crew and getting to know them better, or back on the ground co-ordinating an assault with a bunch of Marines, or even organising your resources to defend an area from an impending onslaught.

One thing you won't come across, however, is a multiplayer mode. It's incredible just how surprising people have found this announcement, given that the online mode has effectively already been released as *Unreal Tournament 2003*. In fact, I tell Glen, it's a heartening move after all these years of hearing the cry of 'single-player gaming is dead'.





"Our background is telling stories, crafting an immersive single-player experience"

GLEN DAHLGREN
PROJECT DIRECTOR

I think you forgot the kneepads.

"It was the hot topic for a while," he agrees, "but our background is telling stories, crafting an immersive single-player experience. We've done multiplayer with *Wheel Of Time* (Legend's 1999 magic shooter), but when you do that you're building two different games. Being able to focus on just one means we can get it right." I point out that in most games the multiplayer seems tacked on anyway.

"It's almost always the case. *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* was nearly an exception, although in that case the multiplayer was actually stronger. And that was because they had two companies working on each mode. That's great, but it's going to cost a lot of money and take a lot of time." This means Legend has not only been able to concentrate its gameplay efforts 100 per cent on the single-player

NEVER SAY NEVER A GUN

WAIT TILL YOU GET A LOAD OF THESE BABIES

The main draw to *Unreal* apart from the graphics was the number of original and imaginative weapons at your disposal. Not only does *Unreal II* satisfy in this area, a demonstration of all the weaponry available and alternative fire modes made everyone's jaw drop. Here's a quick run-down of some of the best ones.



Rocket Launcher Again, the Alt mode offers something very different. Once your crewman Isaac has modified it for later missions you can set a target for four different rockets and then watch them home in. A beauty.

Assault rifle Your main weapon, functioning as a normal machine gun in normal fire. Alt fire shoots a hunk of bullets that explode on impact and bounce off surfaces, so you can effectively shoot round corners.

Flamethrower The primary fire is as beautiful as *Wolfenstein*'s tongues of flame, but it's the Alt mode that impresses most. Lay down a trail of napalm and use like a fuse. Great for creating traps.

Grenade Launcher This can carry up to six types of grenade: incendiary, EMP, toxic (laying clouds that can be used defensively), fragmentary, smoke and concussion. This last one can be used to push people off ledges or, in combination with the smoke grenade, show off the amazing particle system: you have to see the smoke disperse with your own eyes to believe it.

Spider Gun Maybe the best of the lot. Envelops targets in tiny vicious spiders, making them run around screaming in agony. Alt fire lets you set eggs as traps.

There's more The incendiary shotgun, EMP laser lance, rocket turrets and field generators... It will be worth the asking price just to play with the weapons.



Try telling him the single-player game is dead.



At times you feel like you're playing a better version of *Halo*.



Don't fancy yours much.

game, it also means it hasn't been hemmed in on the technological side. When you don't have to worry about your engine and levels being populated by dozens of people, you can pump up the polygons and go crazy. Which is why *Unreal II* is significantly better-looking than *UT2003*. Quite a boast.

VERY CONTENT

But of course visuals aren't everything. When the first *Unreal* came out it had adoring reviews everywhere because it looked so good (and so colourful compared to the cack-toned *Quake*). But it wasn't long before people realised there wasn't a whole lot of gameplay under the glaze. I asked Glen how important the obviously fantastic technology of *Unreal II* was when weighed against gameplay. "I'm probably a bit biased because I come at it from a design point of view," he says, "so I'm always about content over technology. However, you want

to have the best graphics you possibly can. It's a balance. I wouldn't want to sacrifice one for the other. It's hard to push both, which is why it's taken us so long to develop *Unreal II*. Normally you have to decide where to fight your battles: is it going to kick ass on the content side or kick ass on the technology? Personally, for the next project I'm thinking about kicking ass on the content side."

And content is really what *Unreal II* is all about. The central plot might not be the most original in the world (find the seven pieces of an ancient artefact before the alien races) but the way it's integrated into the game rather than

"The game should be completely bug-free and ready to ship come January"



Oh dear, I think that's game over.

Q&A

BOB BATES



We talked to Legend's studio head, co-founder and the man largely responsible for the plot and characterisation in *Unreal II* about the importance of a good story...

PCZ What's your background as a storyteller?

BB I guess I'm a failed novelist. I've also written a book on game design, so writing is my area of expertise.

PCZ Is writing for games more restrictive?

BB It's different. On a game you're working with a lot of talented people, programmers, level designers and all that. I'm just another member of the team, while a novel is a solitary experience with a lot more freedom. It's a trade-off. Movie scriptwriting is a lot closer to game writing. And I always do the voice direction, so the actors know what they're doing.

PCZ Shooters haven't traditionally had a strong story. Is that the way forward for the genre?

BB I would hope that the way forward for all genres is that there's room for story. Not all games need one, but the ones that do really benefit. Putting the player in a broader context and giving them a grounding for where they are and why they're doing things is important in strategy games, RPG or anything else.

PCZ The trick must be to incorporate the story without making the player too impatient to get to the action.

BB That's the real challenge. We wanted *Unreal II* to have a strong story but we also knew it was a strong action franchise, and didn't want anything to get in the way of the action. So the story takes place where it doesn't interfere. You don't want to interrupt a big firefight to have to talk to somebody. So the storytelling in *Unreal II* is done in brief snippets. But you can pack a lot of character into a line or two of dialogue.



I am not worthy.



"Don't you turn your back on me."



"Are you sure that gun is big enough?"

What FPS would be complete without a flamethrower?

understand what's going on – you can still go off and shoot things. We never want to dilute the action experience, but we're going to add stuff to it."

UNREALLY CLOSE

I've only really touched on what playing *Unreal II* is like. Like all great games you need to play it to fully appreciate it. The touches of teamplay and the necessity to work out tactics when defending an area all add extra dimensions. And while *Legend* has made it clear how secondary

the graphics are to the game's content, there's no getting away from some extraordinary alien vistas, especially the huge outdoor areas brimming with animal and plant life. It also has exceptional AI, making enemies as realistic and challenging as any I've ever come across. What's more, each type of enemy poses a different test, whether it's an ultra-tough armoured alien warrior, an intelligent team of soldiers trying to corner you or just the sheer numbers of creatures out for your blood.

Best of all is the news that the game is on schedule and should be completely bug-free and ready to ship come January. In fact, just as we were going to press we received official confirmation that the game will in fact be finished within a few short weeks. Which means, hold your breath now... *PC ZONE* will be bringing you a massive exclusive review of the game in our very next issue, on sale January 9. And if a true gamer's heart beats within you, that's very good news indeed. [X]

Pure eye candy.



ALL THE GAME'S A STAGE



"Now what's the address for Monsters Reunited?"

IT'S THE STRONG CHARACTERS THAT WILL MAKE *UNREAL II* UNIQUE. THAT'S WHAT LEGEND IS HOPING ANYWAY

It's hardly Shakespeare, but the characters in *Unreal II* are slightly more three-dimensional than you'd expect for an FPS. Most of the dialogue and interaction happens on board your spaceship in between missions. This is your opportunity to slowly get to know each of your crewmates better and, in turn, watch your own character (John Dalton) develop.

Dalton is an ex-marine now working as a security marshal for the Terran Confederate Authority and desperate to get back into the military fold. Like most action heroes, he's not too bright. Aida Shen on the other hand, Legend's concession to the hormone-crazy shooter crowd, is far more than just a pretty face and well-developed body. Thanks to a very bad experience when working with the army as a teenager, she is cynical and bitter. As Bob Bates explains: "When you first see her – the way she looks and dresses – you think there's going to be a romantic interest or sexual innuendo. But she's a rebel who doesn't trust anyone, unlike Dalton who is a bit naive about the chain of command. As the story progresses their arcs cross, so he realises you can't put blind faith in authority and she realises you have to trust someone – you can't be completely cynical."

Completing the crew is Isaak Borisov, an engineer with a disgraced past who modifies weapons and briefs you on them, and the childlike alien pilot Ne'Ban, who provides most of the game's humour and a curious side-plot.

"Do you mind if I squeeze past please?"

"In an effort to push the jaded FPS genre, you have dialogue choices when you talk to characters"

acting as an excuse makes it all the more compelling.

And, in an effort to push the jaded FPS genre into deeper and more meaningful directions, you actually have dialogue choices whenever you talk to characters. That doesn't make it an adventure game by any stretch of the imagination, but it does ensure a kind of immersion closer to RPG hybrids like *Deus Ex*.

Glen is quick to point out the guidelines they set themselves to still please the hardcore action fans. "*Deus Ex* attempted to be all things to all people and, in some ways, I think they went a little too far, only because the traditional FPS fan has certain expectations. *Wheel Of Time* succeeded on a lot of levels, but it diverged from the fans' expectations. And while there's a hardcore community that still plays it, you can't veer too far from the formula. At least not all at once. *Unreal II* is a traditional shooter, but it has some other stuff to start thinking about, with lots of dialogue and so on. But none of it should make you think you don't

101
GAMES
20

DOOM III

ETA
Spring
2003

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: id Software | www.idsoftware.com

It's the biggest game in the world. But you probably know that because you've already played it...

THERE'S NO doubting that in terms of pre-release hyperbole, *Doom III* is currently the biggest game in development, something which has made id Software worried about over-exposure. So, to ensure the world wasn't swamped with *Doom III* material, id

witness some of the physics and scripting that should lift *Doom III* above being just another shadowy corridor shooter, but of course it was designed specifically to show off key graphical features rather than be indicative of gameplay itself.

"Spooky, claustrophobic, spiked with scripted shock mechanisms and looking better than anything else"

released a handful of screenshots with the official word that no more were going to be available until after the New Year. Ironically, a few days later an early version of the code was leaked onto the Internet and downloaded by just about everyone with a fast enough connection.

The illegal alpha contained three levels and is the same demo that was shown off at May's E3. You can wander around *Doom*'s trademark pipe-infested corridors, play with a few of the weapons, shoot a few of the monsters that are scattered around and

As id's John Carmack himself now famously stated: "Making any judgements from a snapshot intended for a non-interactive demo is ill-advised." Indeed, but it has given the world a slightly better idea of the direction the game is taking. Spooky, claustrophobic, spiked with scripted shock mechanisms, and generally looking – not to mention moving – better than pretty much anything that's gone before. Bring it on.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



Hi! My name's Damien and I'll be your rep while you're in Lanzarote.

Look at those pipes...

COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Gearbox | www.gearboxsoftware.com

ETA
March
2003

Has Counter-Strike had its day? Has it bollocks...

WHERE OH where has this one got to, eh? Did it get lost behind the U-bend in a drunken stupor one night? Well, unsurprisingly, no. Despite the promise of an August 2002 release, the boys and gals at Gearbox, perfectionists that they are, decided they weren't happy with the product. Which is surprising considering that when we saw

making *Condition Zero* virtually unrecognisable from *Counter-Strike*.

Although there's no concrete release date yet, March is currently looking likely, a fact backed up by the impending release of a patch which adds three unique weapons from *Condition Zero* to existing *Counter-Strike* games (the FAMAS and Galil sub-machine guns and

"Scripted action sequences have been added to heighten the excitement"

code back in May, it was not only looking finished, but utterly stunning to boot.

So what's new for this single-player version of the world's favourite online shooter? Well for starters, missions are set to be far more immersive than their online counterparts, with scripted action sequences having been added in order to heighten the excitement and throw up new, unexpected objectives halfway through missions. The *Half-Life* engine has also been continually tweaked,

most notably the riot shield). It's the clearest indication yet that Gearbox is getting the CS community ready for the release of *Condition Zero* (CZ will be backwardly compatible with *Counter-Strike*, meaning no one will be excluded from the action). Look out next month for our massive exclusive preview on what could well be the biggest game of 2003.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



The greatest online game ever, now offline.



Halo has one of the best videogame plot twists ever.



Master Chief takes a covenant dropship. By 'eck, it's gorgeous.



You – and aliens – have a battle suit that needs time to recharge once depleted.

HALO

ETA
Summer
2003

Save mankind in an intergalactic holy war!

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bungie/Gearbox
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/games/halo/

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Immersive storyline with tons of amazing surprises
- State-of-the-art graphics
- Stunning AI for friendly troops and enemies
- Loads of cool vehicles to drive and fly
- Online multiplayer for PC version

HALO HAS already sold over a million copies on Microsoft's big fat Xbox console, and the fantastic news is that the magnificent first-person shooter is coming to PC courtesy of Gearbox (of *Condition Zero* fame).

So what's all the fuss about? Well, in a nutshell, Bungie's epic sci-fi blaster provides one of the most immersive FPS experiences since *Half-Life*, and should do the business on PC with the added bonus of online multiplayer levels. As the finest soldier in the military, the rock-hard Master Chief, you have to wage war on a religious cult of various aliens called the Covenant who are hellbent on destroying mankind.

You begin the adventure on Earth's last hope, the Pillar of Autumn warship, but are soon forced to abandon it along with the remnants of the crew of Spartan-II soldiers after it's attacked by superior Covenant forces. Once you crash-land on the mysterious ringed world of Halo, you have to team up with the scattered Earth forces to find a way of destroying the Covenant, discover Halo's terrifying secrets and escape.

SUPER TROOPERS

Although *Halo* isn't squad-based, certain sections of the game allow you to team up with and fight alongside intelligent computer-controlled Earth

troops. The AI is fantastic, so your men will fall back, cover you, take advanced positions and tear into battle, as well as jump on board the vehicles in the game – including tanks and jeeps – to take control of gun positions. Enemy AI is equally as complex, with many different behaviours seen in the various alien types – the small, squeaky-voiced Grunts might run away or hide if you attack, whereas the powerful Hunters may suddenly charge towards your position in a blind rage when shot.

Your character has both human and alien weapons to play with, but in a brilliant gameplay decision, is only allowed to carry two at any time, forcing you to make some very tough choices along the way.



HEAVENLY VISUALS

Halo's graphics are also a work of art, moving seamlessly from claustrophobic interiors aboard spaceships and alien structures to huge outdoor environments with waterfalls, sunlight glinting through trees and the ever-present Halo stretching out high above you. The aliens themselves are fantastic creations, with great animation and detailed skin and clothing wrapped with reflective armour and battle-scarred weaponry.

Finally, there's the multiplayer levels, which on the Xbox involved up to four players on the dreaded split-screen or 16 players on an unlikely multi-box LAN. Deathmatch, CTF and other challenges were all present. On PC however, Bungie and Gearbox are looking to provide a proper online multiplayer experience, which should easily eclipse the thrills of the Xbox multiplayer.

Excited yet? You should be. *Halo* on PC should be the definitive version of Bungie's masterpiece with a storyline that contains one of the scariest twists ever seen in a videogame, awesome graphics, cracking physics, an armoury of human/alien weapons and vehicles plus an unrivalled online multiplayer experience. We want it now.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



"One of the most immersive FPS experiences since *Half-Life*"

**101
GAMES
OF
2003**

**ETA
Summer
2003**



SWITCH UP PLACED CLOTHING
CUSTOM CHARACTERS NAMED TO
DON KIRBY (NTU DICK LANE)
YOU KNOW I LOVE REBELION
SWITCH UP PLACED CLOTHING
THE KIRBY IS THE TOP IT IS



We are cool, we are badass...



One of the denizens of Mega City One racing to the Romero Mega Mall for a can of Dr Pepper.

Who you calling a cultist?

JUDGE DREDD VS JUDGE DEATH

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Rebellion | www.rebellion.co.uk

We've waited more than 20 years for a decent 2000AD game. It's nearly here

WE'VE ALL had to dispatch zombies at one time or another and usually it's just a case of filling them with lead, but the undead immortal enemy of Judge Dredd is a completely different kettle of fish. While he's vulnerable to a well-deserved hail of bullets, Judge Death is able to vacate his host body and move into a new one, whereupon the unwilling new host will rapidly decay into the familiar toothy-grinned arch nemesis of our grim-faced hero. Finding him may not be much of a problem, even in a city of billions; wiping him out certainly will be. And we haven't even mentioned Death's three chums either: Fear, Mortis and Fire.

Thankfully, as veteran 2000AD readers will know, the four Dark Judges will meet their end, probably in some faraway alternate dimension, but before we get there, we have the prospect of exploring Mega City One, one of the most expansive and outlandish locales ever transferred to a computer game. It's been tried before, many times, but this time the boys at Rebellion are fanboy-keen to get it right. And since the UK's premier FPS developer actually owns 2000AD, there's every chance that they will.

Unfortunately Rebellion is keeping tight-lipped on what will be in the game and it's hard to pin down exactly which

characters, weapons and locales we can expect. We know for certain that we'll meet Dredd's faithful droid Walter, his psychic partner Judge Anderson and

We've yet to see Judge Death in true digital form, but Rebellion assures us that it plans to take fear to the next level. With *Aliens Vs Predator* already under

"We have the prospect of exploring Mega City One, one of the most expansive locales ever"

an army of Death-loving cultists. From the Justice Dept arsenal too, Dredd won't just have to rely on his Lawgiver sidearm; even if his six different varieties of ammo are usually enough to fend off any perp that crosses his path.

their belts, we've got a spare pair of kecks on just in case *Dredd Vs Death* lives up to expectations.

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"Bloody contact lenses."

**ETA
Q1
2003**

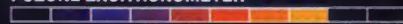
STALKER: OBLIVION LOST

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | www.gsc-game.com

BILLED AS a 'survival action-RPG', *Stalker: Oblivion Lost* would have to be considered as among the best-looking PC games currently in development. The level of detail in the environments is phenomenal, with some of the most convincing foliage we've ever seen and simply stunning graphical effects. The concept is also a compelling one: you are a 'stalker' in near future Ukraine, a scavenger and trader in the ruined, densely irradiated Zone surrounding Chernobyl. Your life involves hunting for 'anomalous' items in

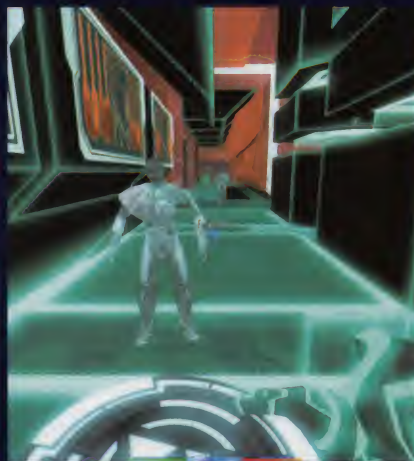
the Zone for sale to interested parties, but inevitably you find yourself caught up in a (strictly non-linear) quest to unravel the mysteries of the Zone – gravity pools, 'concentrates', sentient beasts and assorted other strangeness. Needless to say, throughout these proceedings you're also battling against the perils of radiation. It's going to be dark, tense stuff, and we are, quite frankly, glowing with anticipation.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™





Tron is the best film about videogames.



Original Tron designer Syd Mead has delivered spectacular new computer environments.

TRON 2.0

■ Pub: Disney Interactive | Dev: Monolith | www.tron20.net

Rage against the machine in Monolith's stunning new shooter

FRESH FROM its success with the superb *No One Lives Forever 2*, developer Monolith is ready to unleash another potential scorcher with the sci-fi shooter *Tron 2.0*. Set 20 years after Disney's cult movie, *Tron 2.0* stars Jet Bradley, the son of the original hero Alan, who has to zap himself inside the computer at the evil fCon corporation to rescue his father.

"In the movie you were only exposed to the mainframe environment, and that had a particular look and feel to it," says Jason Hall, Monolith's CEO. "But now, 20 years later, there are a number of other computer systems for you to explore ranging from Internet hubs to personal PDAs."

Jet has access to a range of powerful weapons, beginning with the famous glowing Light Disc from the film, which can be thrown at enemies, held as a shield or used to trigger switches. Other weapons,

that can all be upgraded with "subroutines", include the grenade-style Balls, a glove device called the Mesh for firing missiles and the Rod, which can be used to stun foes, shoot deadly projectiles and attack enemies from a great distance with a sniper mode.

Monolith's new LithTech Triton engine is looking gorgeous, perfectly capturing the technosheen of the films, with the original designer Syd Mead on board to add authenticity and re-make the Light Cycles for a spectacular upgrade of *Tron*'s most famous action scene.

Hacking into *Tron 2.0* next spring could be an electric dream come true.



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DEVASTATION

■ Pub: HD Interactive | Dev: Digitalo | www.devastationgame.com

STRUGGLING to rear its head out of the mire of no-name first-person shooters, *Devastation* is a sharp-looking run-and-gunner with an emphasis on team-based multiplayer action. With a tweaked *Unreal* engine at its core, *Devastation*'s most striking feature is without doubt its post-apocalyptic good looks. It's only one of a dozen good-looking *Unreal*-engine games on the way, but this should be among the best.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™

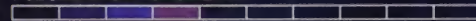


KREED

■ Pub: TBA | Dev: Burut | www.kreed3d.com

WHILE IT would be wrong to generalise too much about a nation's character, we can pretty safely say that all Russians are large, ruddy-faced peasants with headscarves or uzi-toting mafia types with a penchant for fermented potato products. Just as surely, we can say that Russian games are almost always solid and reliable, but never stray too far from a given generic formula. *Kreed* is a case in point. It looks great and should be a lot of fun, but does nothing particularly new.

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FIRESTARTER

■ Pub: TBA | Dev: GSC Game World | www.gsc-game.com

GSC GAME World is the Ukraine's premier games studio. Their flagship shooter for 2003 is featured on the opposite page. *Firestarter*, by comparison, is a bit of fluff. In fact, it looks worrying like *Quake III* at times. However, it also looks like silly amounts of fun, with clever enemies that hunt you in packs and a great looking engine. It would be churlish not to mention it.

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**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



The new game expands on the blueprint set by Wolf's brilliant multiplayer modes.



The Milktray Man finally snaps.

WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY

ETA
Q2
2003

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Splash Damage/Mad Doc Software/id Software | www.idsoftware.com

What do the Chinese know? 2003 is the year of the Wolf

"Enemy Territory hopes to be to Return To Castle Wolfenstein what Vice City is to GTA3"

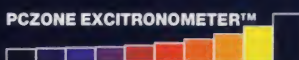
ONCE A mere add-on pack, now promoted to the lofty yet obscure realms of the standalone semi-sequel, *Enemy Territory* hopes to be to *Return To Castle Wolfenstein* what *Vice City* is to *GTA3*, or even what *Unreal Tournament* was to *Unreal*. And the premise of the game is novel enough to make us think it might just do it.

Instead of a strictly solo single-player campaign, *Enemy Territory* puts you in charge of an elite squad of Army Rangers, with five different classes of player, each with different skills: stealing uniforms, performing

reconnaissance, erecting bridges, building towers and commanding bases. All of which means that *Enemy Territory* is a world away from the solo single-player campaign of its predecessor. And although we'd never dream of calling a game from id's stable an RPG, you do get the opportunity to 'level-up' by earning key skills and equipment to help you progress through the ranks as leader.

What makes all this sound even better is that you can also play through the campaigns in two-player co-operative mode or go online and play with up to 64 players in Objective and Last Man Standing modes, as well as through a series of linked campaigns between the Allied and Axis teams, each split into a number of six-man squads. When you join the server you can join an existing squad or set up a new one with you as leader.

Todd Hollenshead, enthusiastic CEO of id Software, reckons it's going to be the "ultimate in World War II squad-based combat", and the more we see of the game the more we think he could be right.

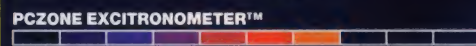


ETA
March
2003

CHASER

■ Pub: JoWoD | Dev: Cauldron | www.chasergame.com

GRANTED, IT'S not the most obvious choice in the list, but we feel pretty confident that *Chaser* will take a great many people by surprise. Not only is it looking stunning, but the action is set to be taut and frenetic, the mayhem enhanced by some stunningly life-like AI. A massive arsenal of real-life and futuristic weaponry will also aid you, as you're propelled through a gripping *Total Recall*-style storyline. Entertainment is assured.

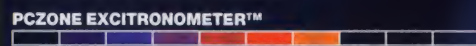


ETA
Q4
2003

FAR CRY

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Crytek | www.crytek.com

WHEN GENETIC experimentation goes awry, it always seems to happen on a tropical island swarming with mercenaries. Maybe it has something to do with the plentiful supply of monkeys, but *Far Cry* is not about to rock the boat now. Rather, it provides us with a familiar scientists-playing-God backdrop for some highly ambitious tactical gunplay. The key word here is scale, as the in-house CryEngine pumps out some immense and detailed environments. This could cut some serious mustard.

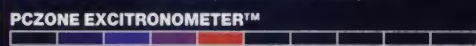


ETA
March
2003

XIII

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Ubi Soft Montreal | www.ubi.com

A CEL-SHADED first-person stealth shooter based on a popular French comic and featuring cartoon-style onomatopoeic effects? Can it work...? Well, when it's got *Unreal* technology at its core, a strong *Bourne Identity*-style plotline and a brief to reinvent the Gallic scribbles at its core, we think perhaps it just can. We're yet to be totally sold, but we've certainly had our interest piqued, and this Looney Tunes concoction could just be Ubi's lucky 13.





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**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



A Counter-Strike-style multiplayer mode is looking very promising.



"And this handy laser pointer is great for lecture presentations."

STAR TREK: ELITE FORCE II

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Ritual Entertainment | www.ritual.com/EF2

ETA
Spring
2003

A *Star Trek* shooter that has us core-breaching with excitement

IT'S IRONIC how the worst *Star Trek* series by far (come on – what about 'DS9'? – Ed) has managed to produce the only good *Trek* game in about five years. The good news is that *Elite Force II* is switching from a *Voyager* to *The Next Generation* setting, automatically making it the best ever.

While the first game had its faults, it did have some great features that deserved more attention. It pre-empted

Unreal II's emphasis on dialogue and mid-mission ship exploration, and had scripted moments during levels where your actions could turn the story slightly in different directions.

New technology allows your elite Federation team to actually explore planetary surfaces this time (putting it in direct competition with *Unreal II*), where you'll meet a far more interesting array of enemies than the first one:

Romulans, Ferengi, Nausicaans and even humans, as well as a couple of new races. The ever-present Borg will also make a return.

Missions will involve boarding a failing Federation ship, floating outside the Enterprise in zero gravity as the ship is attacked by hordes of aliens and investigating a planet colony in the aftermath of a struggle. And to ensure continuity with the first game

you will once more play the bi-sexual Alex Munro. Nice.

Although there will still be stealth levels and end of level bosses, it looks like *Elite Force II* will fix everything that was wrong with the original and ensure it will appeal to non-Trekkers too. It could be the biggest surprise of 2003.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



Defort: Red Bird, this is Spike One. Insertion OK. We're heading to the northeast, over.

Helicopter insertions. That can really make your eyes water.

WE DON'T like war. People get killed, you don't get to wash and it happens all too often. We do like playing at war though. No one gets killed, and the only obstacle to personal hygiene is laziness and the desire to spend all hours of the day killing pretend people. But if you thought *Medal Of Honor* was as close to the front line as you were going to get, you haven't seen *Vietcong*. It makes *MoH* feel like a backyard waterpistol fight.

You can practically smell the sap bleeding from the trees as you move through *Vietcong*'s dense jungles; the

oppressive humidity coating you in a mosquito-bitten coat of thick sweat. And, when the bullets start flying, you'll want to duck out of the way lest they fly out of the monitor and turn your face into a soggy mess. That's how real it feels.

As part of a six-man Special Forces team, at least you're never alone, but that doesn't mean the tension lets up for even a second. You need to keep alert for trip-mines, listen to every crackling branch or passing wild animal in case it turns out to be Charlie on your trail, and keep a head

level enough to bark out orders at the crucial time. Not that the highly intelligent team (comprising a guide, a medic, an engineer, a machine-gunner and radioman) won't

behave like real people at all times – watching your back, providing cover or, if you're unlucky, legging it. The problem is that the enemy partakes of the same sublime AI, reminding you that every heartbeat could be your last.

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"You can practically smell the sap bleeding from the trees"

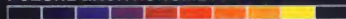


DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

■ Pub: Take 2 | Dev: 3D Realms |
www.3drealms.com

The longest running joke in the games industry has been dragging on for so long now that it's actually not funny any more. We only mention it at all because we're hoping it will have become funny again by the time you read this. However, 3D Realms, rather than giving us any actual news on *Duke Nukem Forever*, has started posting links on its website to 'hilarious' articles that poke fun at the game's unprecedented delays, effectively sapping whatever humour remained in the situation. But whatever you say about the existence or not of this title, there simply has to be another *Duke Nukem* game at some point. And if it's not in 2003 then chances are we'll all stop caring. Of course if it landed on our desks tomorrow replete with gorgeous graphics and stunning set pieces, we'd probably fill our strides with excitement.

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UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

■ Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Digital Reality | www.infogrames.com

OK, we're going out on a bit of a limb here, but Infogrames has said that it now plans to release yearly updates of its flagship shooter. And the 2003 tag on this year's iteration pretty much whacks you over the head with the notion that this is set to become a franchise in the sporting tradition of your *NBA Lives* and *FIFAs*. If this is true, then we know what to expect. As a showcase for the continually developed *Unreal* engine, the game will incorporate the next wave of graphical and physics effects while retaining essentially the same gameplay. More expressive faces, more accurate 'real physics', perhaps a bit of deformable terrain. Maybe a new mode or two, a couple of maps, and a bloody brilliant shooter at its core.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



POSTAL 2

■ Pub: TBC
 Dev: Running With Scissors |
www.runningwithscissors.com

There's one reason why you should be extremely interested in and/or concerned about *Postal 2*, and that's extreme guts-out violence. This first-person shooter sequel to the 1997 isometric 3D game *Postal* should re-ignite the 'violence in games' debate with its pull-no-punches gory action. Using the *Unreal* engine and KARMA physics, your postal dude has to slay his way through more than 100 characters to find Gary 'Diff'rent Strokes' Coleman and get his autograph. "I like using the shovel to chop peoples heads off," says CEO of Running With Scissors Vince Desi. "We've also added a new feature that lets you play with the severed heads." Sick, funny and very violent. Who wouldn't want to play a shooter like that?

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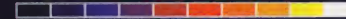


MAX PAYNE 2

■ Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Rockstar/Remedy |
www.remedy.fi

It exists. That's pretty much all we know about this game. Since the game's announcement at E3 2002, the doors at Remedy and Rockstar have slammed shut, not a whiff of information escaping in the last six months. Of course, we can be pretty confident of a few things. Firstly that Max himself will return, along with the third-person action and patented bullet-time technology with which he is synonymous. Also that the game will very probably be equally as brilliant as its noirish predecessor. Admittedly, it will be tough for the developers to come up with some new gameplay twist now that every two-bit developer has hopped on the slo-mo bandwagon. But with the combined talent of Remedy and Rockstar we don't have too many concerns; we just can't wait to see what they come up with.

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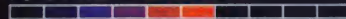


XENUS

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Deep Shadows |
www.deep-shadows.com

Xenus is a brutal first-person shooter set in Colombia that also features role-playing and trading elements. As hero Kevin Myers (Kevin?!?) you have to search for your sister who has gone missing in the jungles of Colombia, earning money and gaining information along the way by dealing with six different warring factions. These groups of NPCs will change and react to the choices you make in the game, so if you decide to hook up with the CIA, don't expect much help from the mafia. Spread over a huge 25km x 25km battlefield with no boundaries, *Xenus* allows you to take command of ten vehicles including motorboats and helicopters, as well as unleash mayhem with more than 20 powerful weapons. Another gorgeous-looking shooter/strategy hybrid.

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PHANTOM CRASH

■ Pub: Phantagram | Dev: Genki |
www.genki.co.jp/

If we can be permitted a guilty admission, we'll confess that we've played this 3D mech shooter on an Xbox, purely for research purposes of course, and can report that it's very nearly brilliant. Unfortunately you need an average of three hands to handle the controls on Microsoft's unwieldy beast of a gamepad, but give this game a mouse and a keyboard and you've got something approaching arcade perfection. It's basically a hyper-speed arena combat game played across vast ruined cityscapes. The action is fast and furious, and it's as much a challenge managing your speed and direction, your arsenal of weapons, your invisibility mode and your limited flight capability as it is actually destroying the enemy. Once you get the hang of it though, *Phantom Crash* is pure, distilled fun.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



CHROME

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Techland |
www.chrome.techland.com.pl

The last few years have seen an eruption of raw coding talent out of Eastern Europe, presumably as all the local boffins stop designing weapons systems and start making games. We're yet to see any stunning interactive works come out of, say, Moldova, but it's all systems go in Poland, where tactical shooter *Chrome* is fast approaching completion.

It's not the best-looking game to emerge from the region, but *Chrome* is nonetheless shaping up as a fun sci-fi romp. The most compelling aspect of the game looks to be the variety of the action, which blends the vast and alien outdoor environs of *Unreal* with the cyber-implants and open gameplay of *Deus Ex*. Add an assortment of drivable vehicles and a good-looking engine and you're left with a very interesting little package.

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QUAKE IV

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Raven |
www.idsoftware.com

The game's been officially announced but no one's seen screenshots yet, just a single piece of concept art. So what do we know about the game? It's being developed by Raven Software (of *Jedi Knight II* and *Soldier Of Fortune 2* fame), it's being built around the sublime *Doom 3* engine and it's going to be multiplayer. Our best guesstimate has *Doom 3* getting released in the summer, leaving *Quake IV* to be officially unveiled at Quake Con 2003 sometime in August. If you're going to push us we'll go the whole way and exclusively reveal that the game will include a rocket launcher or two and go on to be the best pure deathmatch game in the world. Beyond that we'll just have to wait and see, but with *UT 2003* essentially conceding to the *Quake* formula, it's up to Raven to find a new way forward.

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101
GAMES
OF
2003

STRATEGY



Ion cutting lasers – the way forward.



Boiled, roasted or mashed, sir?



Colour-coded lasers – a sci-fi classic.



HOMEWORLD 2

ETA
Spring
2003

The Canadian space program roars back into life...

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Relic Entertainment
PUBLISHER Sierra
WEBSITE www.homeworld2.com

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Homeworld* was a regular phenomenon
- Brand new 3D engine should set new standards in the genre
- Extensive mod community support
- Revamped, streamlined interface system

TO SAY we were big fans of *Homeworld* would be like saying Bill Clinton was a big fan of the internship program. Even though the early screenshots of this full-on sequel make it look like it's been rendered entirely in orange, we've nonetheless started to feel the same sense of giddy excitement that flooded our brain cells with endorphin juice the first time round.

Details of gameplay mechanics are currently rarer than wit in an Adam Sandler film, but what we do know is that Relic has knocked up a brand new engine for the game, overhauling both

the look and the interface systems. We've made a ton of improvements," says Alex Garden of Canadian developer Relic, "some designed to address concerns we had with the interface in *Homeworld*, others designed to create new gameplay features that just weren't possible first time round."

SPIT AND SHINE

These include a more streamlined movement system, context sensitive right-click menus, as well as totally overhauled research and construction departments – perhaps the only criticisms we had of the first game.

Along with a phalanx of new ships to play with, the basic mothership designs are getting a touch of spit and shine, visually remaining similar but having their functions beefed up immeasurably. Although you still only get one to play with in the single-player game, multiplayer will open up distinctively varied motherships depending on the race. You'll only have two at first, but Garden is promising "exciting things" for players after the game ships. Which probably means extra races and missions in an expansion pack.

Visual additions appear to include beefed up Ion lasers that actually slice through their targets (à la *Babylon 5*), more dynamic looking ship trails that give a better sense of speed, and much more detail on the ship models. For the fanboys, Relic is getting fully into the mod scene this time, promising to provide extensive tools and support for budding amateur coders. For the hippies it's bad news though – '70s prog rockers Yes don't appear to be involved with the music this time. Somehow I think we'll manage.

What *Homeworld 2* sadly won't have going for it anymore is the 'Wow, Crikey' factor, as since the startling debut of the original, practically every space faring developer and his astro dog have nicked the template and added their own twist to it. Relic's own twists will have to once again redefine the genre if it wants to keep its crown. Luckily Relic's other biggie, *Impossible Creatures*, shows that there's no shortage of innovative thought left at the team, so chances are pretty strong that *Homeworld 2* won't just be more of the same only better – it will be just plain better.

"Relic has knocked up a brand new engine for the game, overhauling both the look and interface system"



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

■ Pub: EA | Dev: EA Pacific | generals.ea.com

Everything else was just practice...

ETA
Feb
2003

THERE'S NOT a strategy fan in the land that could look at the screenshots or trailers for *Command & Conquer: Generals* and not be turned into a gibbering fool by its glorious cinematic renderings. This transition of the classic RTS series into the 3D arena was hardly unexpected after *Emperor: Battle For Dune*, but perhaps more surprising is that the gameplay and style marks a conscious return to the original games, despite the fact that developer EA Pacific only worked on *Red Alert: 2* and the *Yuri's Revenge* expansion pack.

This time the game opts for a three-way military struggle between the forces of China, America and a terrorist organisation called the GLA (Global Liberation Army). As with the *Dune* games there's been a lot of honing done, so they're distinctly different both in terms of units and buildings, and also

Eat my particle uplink.



Just like the Mammoth tanks of old.



those intrinsic details that affect how a side physically plays – like resource management and secret weapons.

Rather than being just a visual overhaul, EA Pacific has tried to integrate the new 3D environment into the very fabric of the game. Instead of pushing units around on a seemingly unresponsive terrain, troops can actually land on top of buildings, jeeps can knock down trees, tanks can batter down walls and explosions devastate everything in their radius. And of course the animations and special effects are just as impressive as the rest of this graphical tour de force.

It's fair to say that through the years the C&C games have rested on their laurels somewhat, languishing in the same style of gameplay without too many efforts to push their own envelope. *Generals* could easily have been a cop-out and just taken the 'C&C in 3D' route



The gameplay might have advanced, but it's still C&C through and through.

and it still would have sold well. Luckily it isn't, and in this case patience has been rewarded with the game C&C fans have been waiting their whole lives for.

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COMMANDOS 3

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Pyro Studios | www.pyrostudios.com

NOT ALL of us got on with the original *Commandos*, but we enjoyed every breathless moment of the wonderfully innovative sequel, and the third game has truly got our pulses racing.

There is a shadow hanging over this sequel though, because the creator of



Back behind enemy lines.

the series and his lead programmer (Gonzo Suarez and Jon Beltran) have both left Pyro to start their own company, so C3 is unlikely to be as lovingly nurtured as the second game.

Having said that, Pyro is still talking it up big, promising more varied gameplay (C2's biggest flaw was repetitiveness) and a less rigid structure compared with the mission-based design of the other two titles. It will also be rather less difficult, with a friendlier learning curve, and of course much better graphics.

If that's not enough, there is also a new multiplayer option, with deathmatch and CTF modes. It seems we've got little to worry about...

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ETA
Summer
2003



One level is set in Stalingrad and has been inspired by *Enemy At The Gates*.

101 GAMES OF 2003



As the brainchild of Brian Reynolds, designer of Civ 2, there's no wonder it looks a bit familiar.

ETA
Q1
2003

RISE OF NATIONS

■ Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Big Huge Games | www.bighugegames.com/riseofnations/

Age Of Empires meets Civilization in a sly strategic cocktail

THE EXCITEMENT over Age Of Mythology has somewhat unfairly overshadowed Microsoft's other forthcoming RTS, Rise Of Nations. While it might be the less glamorous of the two, RoN is all about cultured gameplay, having been created as a curious hybrid of Civilization and Age Of Empires, two classic yet very different strategy games.

Players have to build up their cities and produce units in the usual real-time way, but they also have to balance this with trade, border expansion, building of new cities and competition with the neighbours over valuable

resources. All this is encompassed in an epic historical timeline where units can go from spear throwers up to stealth bombers in the same way as historical turn-based games like Civ and Call To Power.

Although the game will have a number of historically based single-player campaigns, the whole experience seems to be very much geared towards the multiplayer



Ships? I see no ships.

"As far as gameplay goes it could leave the competition sobbing over their runners-up rosettes"



Throw history in the mixer and see what comes out...

mode. And rather than the slow ponderous nature of many turn-based games, the real-time action of Rise Of Nations allows levelling up and unit production to be done very quickly. Indeed, battles can be both frantic and vast in a similar style to the epic Cossacks.

When compared to the lush 3D renderings of Age Of Mythology, Microsoft's 2D Rise Of Nations might look like Jabba the Hut in a swimsuit, but as far as gameplay goes it could well leave the competition sobbing over their runners-up rosettes.

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ETA
Spring
2003

IMPERIUM GALACTICA III: GENESIS

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: Mithis | www.ig3.de
ARE HOMEWORLD'S days numbered as big cheese of the 3D space RTS? They are if developer Mithis has anything to do with it. Stunning graphics and a streamlined interface are set to propel this third instalment of the IG series to new heights, doing away with the hardcore strategy elements held so dear by episodes 1 and 2. With breathtaking battles and a compelling plot, this is looking mighty good.

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ETA
May
2003

CRUSADERS: BATTLE FOR OUTREMER

■ Pub: Wanadoo | Dev: Black Cactus | www.blackcactus.com

USING AN updated version of the Warrior Kings engine, Crusaders is currently looking like being the RTS most likely to challenge the supremacy of Medieval: Total War in 2003. Stunning fully strategic 3D landscapes, epic battles of up to 400 beautifully rendered soldiers and superb siege technology are only a few of the mouth-watering features promised.

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ETA
January
2003

MASTER OF ORION 3

■ Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Quicksilver | moo3.quicksilver.com

IN THE world of '4X' space strategy games (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, eXterminate), the Master Of Orion series is galactic emperor. And this latest iteration is by far the biggest and most intricate yet. It has 32 races, 256 solar systems, up to 10,000 planets and moons to colonise and totally revamped real-time tactical space combat. It's dense, heavy stuff, but for sheer life-consuming depth of gameplay, nothing else comes close.

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Every tank is modelled with serial killer precision.



Air support plays a big part in the game.



BLITZKRIEG

Pub: CDV | Dev: Nival | www.nival.com

ETA
March 7
2003

BLITZKRIEG LOOKS

uncannily like *Sudden Strike 2*; so much so you'd be forgiven for thinking it's the unofficial third game in the series. This is apparently not the case, despite coming from the same publisher and the same part of the world, namely Russia.

So what is *Blitzkrieg* then? Rather than a reinforcement for *SS2*'s botched assault, it is in fact an ambitious attempt to marry the kind of accessibility and playability of *Sudden Strike* with all the depth and detail of a hardcore sim such as *Close Combat*. With proper 3D units and a lovely terrain engine, the game offers far more detail and accuracy than

"It may be best to keep your 'Pocket Guide to WWII Tanks' by your side playing this one"

SS, with excellent unit animation, a huge variety of units and a much greater emphasis on realism and battlefield tactics. New units from France and Italy are an intriguing prospect (expect the Italian campaign to be short), as is the option for your troops and tanks to dig in. Experience can be carried through each campaign and even factors like morale will be taken into consideration, so expect to see your troops running away if you send them into a deadly ambush.

It may be best to keep your 'Pocket Guide To WWII Tanks' by your side playing this one, but if the developers can truly marry all this detail with excitement and ease of use, we could be looking at one of the finest WWII strategy games ever made.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



Cossacks: Back To War

Play online for a chance to win a crate of the finest Cristall Premium Vodka widely recognised as Russia's finest



The battle continues....

The award-winning historical real-time strategy has returned! For the loyal and die hard fans, *Back To War* offers over 100 new missions, new countries and new units, and even more improved AI. For the newcomers, *Cossacks - Back To War* has been developed as a product in itself, so that you get the latest and most updated *Cossacks* experience packed with the newest of gameplay features.

Fight your way across the battlefields of Europe, seek allies and vanquish the enemy. It's yet another must for any *Cossacks* fan old and new!

Features

- *Cossacks - Back To War* is both a standalone version (does not require a previous version of *Cossacks*), and an expansion pack
- A total of 20 different European nations to command
- 100 new single player missions
- 4 levels of difficulty
- 2 new nations: Switzerland and Hungary
- Unique architecture for each new nation, Switzerland and Hungary, with 20 new buildings
- 4 new Swiss units
- 4 new Hungarian units
- New Automated Championship System (ACS) makes the online competition a top event
- Special VIZOR enables watching online GAMES live or as a recording
- New units for Turkey & Algeria: The Bedouin (mounted on camel)
- Extra: Modu with 30 more new units (including coast defence cannon)



www.cossacks.com

cdv

GAME WORLD

**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



The Egyptians try burning their own camp to create a diversion.



PRAETORIANS

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Pyro | www.praetoriansgame.com

A Roman RTS of truly orgiastic proportions

SINCE we printed a lavish preview on this stunning historical RTS last issue, it would probably be a waste of space to cover the same ground, so for those who missed it, may we suggest you either call our back-issues hotline or check it out at www.pczone.co.uk. When everyone's up to speed we shall continue... Done? Good.

We'd hope that by now you're at the stage where drool is dripping from your chin (through anticipation, not boredom, you fool!) and therefore very pleased

to hear that the game is nearing completion, with the missions virtually complete, voices in, optimisations made and localised versions done for all the major languages of the world, bar a hundred or so. The latest code flown into the office now includes a skirmish and multiplayer mode, so we've been having a bit of fun with it, even managing to pry Rhianna off *Age Of Mythology* and Martin away from his beloved *Warrior Kings*. Aside from the detailed graphics, the big draw is that even though the

Not even our editor's magazine collection features this much discipline.

game offers a wealth of epic battles almost on a par with *Medieval* and *Shogun*, it's as easy to pick up and play as *Command & Conquer*. To avoid overexposure, we shall say no more about it until next issue when we'll have a huge playable demo for you on our cover discs. It's not quite the weather for sandals, but we think you'll make an exception for a strategy epic so rich.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



"Aside from the detailed graphics, the big draw is that it's as easy to pick up and play as *Command & Conquer*"

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

■ Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Black Cactus | www.blackcactus.com

The most underrated RTS in the business takes another stab at greatness

ALONG with the *Total War* games, *Warrior Kings* has stood as a beacon of originality in the world of RTS gaming. However, publisher Microids' retreat from our shores meant the title never received the support it deserved, and once the limited

amount of UK copies flew off the shelves, the game pretty much disappeared from public view. Luckily, things are looking up for those who missed this stunning 3D RTS, as the standalone follow up, *Warrior Kings: Battles*, is almost upon us.

Set 100 years after *Warrior Kings*, the game puts you on a campaign to unify the mythical world of Orbis. Taking one of five distinct technological routes, you'll be able to build the units that most suit your playing style, to pit against a whopping 69 enemy generals, all with their own life-like attributes.

Like *Stronghold: Crusader*, the focus of this semi-sequel is on skirmish play, something that was lacking from the original. Skirmishes can be played both against the AI and online, with Internet play now optimised to avoid the latency problems of the first game.

We asked lead designer, Nick Ricks, why he thought *WKB* was going to be a hit. "One of the many cool things about it is the AI Generals. They don't cheat, and give an excellent, varied game." Testing and balancing 69 AI generals is not going to be easy, but we have every confidence Black Cactus can pull it off.

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Depending on your preferred style of combat, you can deploy hundreds of loyal troops.



...or one of these buggers.



AMERICAN CONQUEST

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | www.americanconquest.com

GSC Game World is making quite a name for itself in the world of strategy gaming. Not content with resting on their *Cossacks* laurels, the Ukrainian coders have been feverishly working on this new game of conquest and epic combat. Using an enhanced version of the *Cossacks* engine, the larger battles will feature an undeniably impressive 16,000 troops, which you'll be able to control either in formations or as individual units. To help you cope with this, much of the nitpicky micromanagement of the *Cossacks* series has been removed, meaning a more exciting game all round.

One of the most impressive claims of the game is that, with its massive unit count, it can simulate the historical battles on the scale on which they actually occurred. Which is truly ground-breaking stuff.

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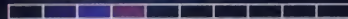
SPELLFORCE: ORDER OF THE DAWN

■ Pub: JoWood | Dev: Phenomic Games | www.spellforce.de

In a genre suffering severely from stagnation, it's rare to see a title as original as *Spellforce*. Melding 3D real-time strategy with party-based RPG elements, *Spellforce* is, however, set in a rather less original mythical world of goblins, orcs and heroes with idiotic names. You get to control a main character that not only casts devastating spells, but can summon a multitude of monsters to aid him in his quests.

It seems like a solid concept – wandering around a fantasy realm trying to recruit fellow heroes to deploy in real-time strategic battles. The controls are simple and intuitive, the character system open-ended and the graphics lush – unsurprising given that *Spellforce* is using the rather lovely *AquaNox* engine. Don't count this one out.

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WARLORDS IV

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: SSG | www.ssg.com.au/warlords4/

The original turn-based *Warlords* games were brilliant. Now, after two mildly successful RTS outings, the franchise is returning to its turn-based roots. Interestingly, developer SSG is persisting with its rapidly dating *Warlords: Battlecry* engine, although we've been promised that all the elements that made the turn-based games so fiendishly addictive will be present and correct. However, rather than the computer automatically resolving each conflict, you'll get to position your troops on a battlefield and take it in turns to use them to attack the enemy, much like the system in *Heroes Of Might & Magic*. It may look like the north end of a south-bound troll, but with 3D height-mapped terrain, more than 130 unique units and some surprisingly cunning AI, there's plenty of life left in *Warlords* yet.

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HIGHLAND WARRIORS

■ Pub: Novalogic | Dev: Data Becker | www.highlandwarriors.com

It's hard to get excited about a game you've hardly heard anything about, but information about this 3D RTS has slowly started trickling our way. And you know what? It isn't looking half bad. Set during the time of William Wallace's struggle against the English, you'll be able to play as both the Scots and English over a series of four campaigns. Economy, diplomacy and military might will have to be carefully balanced, but the true test will come from the highly tactical battle sequences. The general lack of information is a bit suspect, but it's looking visually sound and could answer the *Braveheart* yearnings in us all. The level of detail looks to be remarkable with the outcome of battles affected even by the changing of seasons, as farming yields drop and snow hampers supply lines.

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COSSACKS II

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: GSC Game World | www.gsc-game.com

Just when you thought the battlefield couldn't get any bigger, GSC Game World ups the stakes they established in *Cossacks* to a massive 32,000 units per battle. *Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars* is the staggeringly large-scale sequel to 2001's excellent *European Wars*. Like its predecessor (and stablemate *American Conquest*, above), *Cossacks II* revolves around true historical events, in this case the campaigns of Napoleon, a man notorious for being a tactical mastermind as well as a hairy midget. The most obvious change here is that the world of *Cossacks* is now in glorious 3D, including a new physics engine designed to make ranged attacks more realistic. Diplomacy will also play a greater role, and multiplayer options will be extended. If bigger truly is better, then you can't get much better than *Cossacks II*.

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UFO: AFTERMATH

■ Pub: Virgin | Dev: Altar Interactive | www.ufo-aftermath.com

The scenario is familiar – a horde of aggressive aliens is threatening mankind, and only a small band of elite troops stand in its way. The name is familiar too – way back in 1994, *UFO: Enemy Unknown* wowed players with a maddeningly addictive blend of turn-based squad-level tactical battles and grand strategy. But for this, the belated successor to that most hallowed of games, one thing is different: the developer. Czech-based Altar has been the lucky team selected to provide us with the supposed 'true' *UFO* sequel, and while all the ingredients are there for a 3D remake, it's a matter of waiting to see if they can recreate the magic of the original. Current indications suggest a dark, gritty atmosphere that is not quite cartoonish enough for our liking, but there's plenty of promise there as well.

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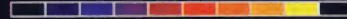


LASER SQUAD NEMESIS (RETAIL)

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Codo Technologies | www.lasersquadenemesis.com

So, while the *UFO* legacy lies in the hands of an unknown Czech outfit, the original developers of *UFO*, *Laser Squad* and all things *X-COM* are carving a new path for themselves. Attentive readers will know that the subscription-based tactical email game *Laser Squad Nemesis* was one of our favourite games of 2002, but what you might not know is that a full retail version is on its way in 2003, with an all-new single-player mode and other major enhancements. The developers are aware that the principal pleasure of the current game is clashing with endlessly devious human minds, and are working on some serious AI in an attempt to simulate this. There's no publisher yet, but it should be with us in the next six months, and you can be damn sure it'll be brilliant.

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KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: THE CRUSADERS

■ Pub: Phantagram | Dev: Phantagram | www.phantagraminteractive.com

Sequel to a quirky but unspectacular RTS/RPG hybrid that singularly failed to set the world on fire, *KUF: The Crusaders* is nothing like its predecessor. It is, on the other hand, chaotic, visually stunning, technically excellent and reminiscent of the opening scenes from *Gladiator*. It's basically a mad fantasy RTS played from an intimate visual perspective, with an emphasis on dense mêlée clashes and use of hero characters with arcade-style special moves. Despite being geared towards the Xbox, there's plenty of depth to be found in the tactical use of terrain, ground height, environmental objects, ranged and mêlée weaponry and even dazzling sunlight.

This is a very different RTS and one we're all too keen to sample.

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101 GAMES OF 2003



Some of the set pieces are superb.

Set well before his adventures with the Lost Ark, the game stars a younger, more sprightly Indy.



INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

ETA
March
2003

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: LucasArts/The Collective | www.lucasarts.com

Indy packs a punch as well as a piece in his latest adventure

INDIANA Jones And The Emperor's Tomb is an Indy game unlike any other. And yet it's probably the most familiar one yet, as LucasArts gets ever closer to the magic of the films.

This time, perhaps 60-70 per cent of the game is pure combat, mostly rough

and ready hand-to-hand brawling, while puzzle-solving and exploration take a back seat. "We really wanted to focus on the action and fighting of the Indy films," explains LucasArts' Reeve Thompson. "We wanted to think about all the aspects of the movies that make them

fun to watch. Obviously it's still an adventure storyline, but we really wanted it to play like a brawler, where you can pick up a bunch of stuff and use it as weapons."

Needless to say Indy still gets to whip his gun out when things get a bit hairy, and for that matter, where would Indy be without his whip? This time he can not only swing across gaps with it, but employ it in combat in some surprisingly effective ways. With one flick of his rawhide he can take weapons out of enemy hands, or wrap it round their scrawny Nazi necks and yank them over for a sharply delivered uppercut.

The new plot is based around an ancient artefact said to hold the power

of mind control. To get his hands on it before the Nazis or the Triads do, Indy must collect various pieces of the Mirror of Dreams, which forms the key to get into the Emperor's Tomb.

Along the way he'll battle an array of enemies, from simple thugs to supernaturally animated terracotta warriors. A number of grand set pieces will be on offer, including a tense battle atop a cable car and a rickshaw chase through the streets of Hong Kong.

"If you think back to the Indy movies," continues Reeve, "there's always a sequence where he's riding on something and doing battle at the same time - mine cars, motorcycles, the truck carrying the Ark of the Covenant - and we've tried to create some levels that are similar to this."

Oh, and on a final note for all you Indy fans, Reeve also let this slip: "We had to run everything by George Lucas to make sure nothing contradicted whatever story he's got for the fourth film." Whatever way you look at it, it seems Indy is set for a comeback...



Fisticuffs, grappling and battering are the order of the day.



They don't like it up 'em.

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There are literally hundreds of bonus missions, training stages and challenges.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

■ Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | www.konamijpn.com/products/mgs2_sub
Snake's back, though we wonder why he left in the first place

THE METAL *Gear Solid* games are just plain cool. There's no other word for it. The tense atmosphere, the cinematic style, the undercover mystique. Plus of course they star the world's second favourite stealth operative, the royal badass Solid Snake. But wait, the big 'surprise' in *Metal Gear Solid 2* on PS2 was that Snake was barely even in the damn game. In fact you only got to play as the main man in one of the chapters, the rest of the time being forced to inhabit the girlish frame of one Raiden, a sword-wielding, wet behind the years rookie not fit to polish Snake's blood-encrusted boots.

However, there is justice in the world, because the stealth masterpiece is coming to the PC very soon, and this grave error has been amended. Not only can you play the entire original game as Snake, Raiden or an assortment of other characters, but five new side-missions or 'Snake Tales' have been added, along with a couple of hundred VR training missions (including a new first-person mode). But there's more! You can also play dozens of new 'Alternative Missions', in which you must negotiate the original levels with all new tasks, such as defusing bombs and taking surveillance photos. And as an added bonus you can get radically airborne in a secret *Tony Hawk's*-style skating mode.



Good taste gets the better of Snake's stealth instincts.

So, we may have had to wait a while for the world's finest stealth sequel to hit our PCs, but when it does, it will be an incredibly rich package – the definitive version if you will. And that's gotta be worth waiting for.

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Snow is back in the spotlight where he belongs.



SPLINTER CELL

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Ubi Soft Montreal | www.splintercell.co.uk

'THE most wanted game this Christmas', eh? Er, yeah. What we really meant to say was, 'the game you'll want this Christmas, but will probably get some time in January'. We only hope you haven't done anything silly like buy an Xbox – trust us, the addition of mouse-look alone will be worth waiting for. Otherwise, what can we say? It's still looking great, and we'll have a review for you next month. With a demo.

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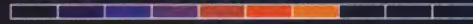


MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Warthog | www.huntthemandown.com

A FIRST-PERSON game combining shooting and vehicular action both on land and in a variety of spacecraft, *Mace Griffin* is a pure-action genre hybrid. It could be another *Halo*. It could also be a bog-standard console shoot 'em up, but with a company of Warthog's competence at the helm, we feel pretty confident it won't be.

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THIEF III

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | www.thief3.com

THE third outing in one of the best stealth series ever produced, *Thief III* is being developed by several of the original Looking Glass team under the direction of Warren 'Deus Ex' Spector. Needless to say, fans of the series can be assured it's in good hands. The mechanical-eyed Garrett is back as the main character and the latest *Unreal* technology is under the bonnet, which means superb shadows and a high level of environmental interaction – perfect for a little thieving.

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101 GAMES OF 2003



Presumably they all chose the blue pill.

DUALITY

■ Pub: Phantagram | Dev: Trilobite Graphics
| www.e-duality.com

Plug this in the back of your head

IT SEEMS strange to us that so few games have successfully captured the essence of the movement that was cyberpunk, despite its seeming influence on games and gaming culture in general. *Deus Ex*, perhaps *Neocron*, and very few others. In concept, Trilobite's action-adventure/RPG *Duality* is about as close to pure Gibson as you can get. Data theft, cybernetic implants, virtual

beings, battles in cyberspace, evil corporations – it couldn't be any more cyberpunk if it starred Keanu Reeves.

With variety firmly in mind, the game is split between three characters – mercenary, hacker and virtual being – each experiencing a different part of the same timeline in successive missions. More Rush than Atomic Kitten, this power trio offers three very different types of action – the

The Mercenary: part Solid Snake, part JC Denton.



ETA
Q3
2003

mercenary is all adrenaline-charged stealth/shooting, while the hacker likes to get out her program bible and fire off spell attacks in cyberspace. Puzzle-solving and character advancement will also figure strongly, in a game Trilobite describes as '*Deus Ex* meets *Metal Gear Solid*'.

We'll be delving deeper into this dark cyber-thriller next issue, so keep your mirror shades close at hand.

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TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Core Design | www.tombraider.com

An old flame returns, but do we still hold a flag for her?

DELAYED from its scheduled November launch, the next Lara Croft adventure is now due on Valentine's Day 2003, the idea being that it's time

to reaffirm our love for Lara, or some such bollocks. It's

also make or break time for the *Tomb Raider* franchise, as the honeymoon is long since over with this ground-breaking adventure series.

In an effort to spice the relationship up a bit, *The Angel Of Darkness*

promises a complex, story-driven game with more sinister elements than previous outings, and even some stealth gameplay. Lara travels to Paris, but is framed for the murder of her former mentor and becomes embroiled in an adventure brimming with underworld deals, grisly killings and ritualistic blood-letting. The major news is that *The Angel Of Darkness*

will also feature a second playable character, Kurtis Trent, plus NPC interaction that apparently affects the ample-breasted heroine's path through the game.

Whether the tricks Lara's learned for *The Angel Of Darkness* can renew our yearning for her awaits to be seen, but it would be boorish not to give her a sporting chance.

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"I wanna see you bounce (throw your hands up) and bounce..."

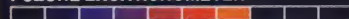


SHADE: WRATH OF ANGELS

■ Pub: Cenega | Dev: Black Element Software | www.shade-game.com

It is only when perched on the porcelain that most of us dare to let the evil within go free, but in *Shade* it's an essential part of the game. The story is this: the hero of the game, drawn into a shadowy world inhabited by abominable beasts, also plays host to a demon so foul the developers still haven't worked up the courage to put it in the game. As such, the entire game is a moral puzzle (over and above being a 'time-travelling survival-horror third-person action-adventure'), in that you are free to unleash your dark side whenever you wish. The more you rely on evil, the more twisted and less human you become (much like your average politician). It's distinctive and good-looking enough to stand out from the current glut of horror-action games, and besides this, we can't wait to unleash the beast.

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LAST NINJA: THE RETURN

■ Pub: Simon & Schuster Interactive (US) | Dev: Studio 3 | www.studio3.co.uk

In the realms of heavyweight nostalgia, games don't come much bigger than this. Sequel to a much-loved trilogy of isometric 8-bit adventures, *Last Ninja: The Return* puts you back in the cloven shoes of the unnamed ninja, still on a mission to avenge his slaughtered clan and rid the world of evil. While fans will recall that the series took a detour into the '80s at one point (in the grand tradition of *Star Trek*, *Battlestar Galactica* and *He-Man*), you can rest assured that the new adventure will stay firmly in the period/fantasy setting of the original game. Rather than the full-on stealth of something like *Tenchu*, *LNTR* will focus on weapons combat, magic and some incredible (but historically documented) ninja gadgetry. And quite frankly, we love that shit.

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SHADOW OF MEMORIES

■ Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | www.konami.com

Originally a PS2 game, *Shadow Of Memories* was in many ways an experiment for developer Konami, and one that was only partially successful. Nevertheless, it still crops up in many a favourite games list for its engaging atmosphere and willingness to mess with your mind. The concept is simple: you are Eike Kusch, a slightly effeminate German chap, and you've just been mysteriously murdered. Somehow though, you're given a second stab at life – a chance to travel back through time to prevent your own death. You also, however, need to worry about the consequences of your actions on other lives... The action is low-key and the plot largely linear, but this is an existential and often beautiful real-time adventure that's a welcome addition to the PC catalogue.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Revolution | www.revolution.co.uk

Charles Cecil and his Revolution team may not be writing point-and-click adventures anymore, but the third part of the *Broken Sword* trilogy will carry on the tradition of strong storytelling, great dialogue and immersing worlds that characterise the series. In *The Sleeping Dragon*, yank George Stobbart and his sexy Gallic companion Nico Collard are drawn into a conspiracy that again features the shadowy Templar Knights and an ancient technology that nearly resulted in the destruction of mankind 10,000 years ago. The new direct control interface has allowed Revolution to add a lot more action to the proceedings, and with dynamic lighting, advanced facial animation and striking 3D environments, the latest *Broken Sword* adventure game could be the best yet.

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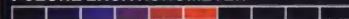


BLOODRAYNE

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Terminal Reality | www.bloodrayne.com

With a name like *BloodRayne* you were never going to get a shrinking violet, but the star of Terminal Reality's latest game has a seriously violent agenda. Half-human and half-vampire (as a result of her mother being raped) she's now got all of the strengths of the undead without any of the weaknesses. According to producer Jeff Mills, the game's "a third-person perspective action title that plays like a first-person shooter," complete with Nazis, "ancient parasitic creatures" and a bit of blood-sucking every time you get low on health. It's set across three huge worlds set in Louisiana, Argentina and Germany and we're getting excited about it because we loved *Nocturne*, the last game from the Terminal Reality studio. Expect another bloody killing spree.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



SILENT HILL 2: INNER FEARS

■ Pub: Konami | Dev: Konami | www.silenthill2.de

Games aren't scary. Generally. But when you start playing *Silent Hill 2* you realise you're in trouble pretty quickly. Your wife has died three years ago but has still managed to send you a letter telling you to return to your 'special place' in Silent Hill. Only a fool would investigate and only a fool would play this on his own with the lights out. Don't expect shock tactics but a general feeling of dread mixed with a sublimely surreal take on sadism that gradually works its way under your skin. What can you expect over the PS2 version? Better graphics (as always) and a new chapter, *Restless Dream* – as if the original didn't provide enough. Already one of the best survival horror games ever made, this is a strong contender for Scariest Game of 2003.

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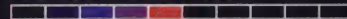


THE GREAT ESCAPE

■ Pub: SCI | Dev: Pivotal Games | www.sci.co.uk

Codemasters' stealth-adventure *Prisoner Of War* promised much and didn't deliver, but Pivotal Games reckons it's cracked the 'Get Out Of Jail Free' formula. The official game of the film, *The Great Escape* will mix action with stealth and allows you get to grips with a load of vehicles as well as giving you control of the main characters from the film, complete with their own individual skills. The Cooler King is your lockpick, MacDonald your brains and Hendley a dirty pickpocket. The game promises a lot more 'out of camp' action than *Prisoner Of War*, allowing you to escape from time to time and see a bit more of the Nazi countryside. Hopefully this will break the tempo of the game up a bit and avoid the rather regimented feel of *POW*. And yes, the finale does involve a motorbike.

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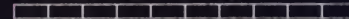


LULA 3D

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: CDV | www.lula3d.com

Before stumbling into the world of hardcore strategy, German publisher/developer CDV was best known for, well, what can only be described as 'jazz' games, most of which were apparently massive in Germany. Their flagship brand was of course *Lula*, who starred in many a classy turn such as *Wet Attack – The Empire Cums Back*. In 2003, *Lula* will finally bust out into full, bump-mapped 3D, though we can't yet confirm the return of the 'horny meter' device from *Lula Lover*. However, we can say with all sincerity that this is the most hotly anticipated erotic 3D adventure of 2003. With features that include 'extra simple mouse controls' to enable you to multitask to your heart's content, we've got a soft spot for *Lula* that's likely to remain that way for some time to come.

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**101
GAMES
2003**

ACTION/STRATEGY



"Pruning is a breeze with the new Wonderblast 3000 Garden Mate."



Land, air, sea, space – all are yours to command. Except the sea.

BREED

ETA
May
2003

We're getting awfully clucky over this baby

■ Pub: CDV | Dev: Brat Designs | www.brat-designs.com

"It's got more original ideas than you'd expect from ten games"

THERE ARE many reasons why we're excited about this game. Chances are they're the same ones that won *Breed* 'PC Game of Show' at ECTS a couple of months back. And one of them – the spectacular graphics – is certainly the reason *Breed* has been chosen by NVIDIA as one of a select handful of games to showcase the power of its new GeForce FX chipset (along with *Unreal II* and *Splinter Cell*). Rightly so as well, as *Breed* really does look like nothing else

out there. The polygon count may not be huge, but there's a sense of grandeur to the game, with its vast and luxuriant environments and immense draw distances, that's difficult to match. As we write this, we've just come from Comdex, where *Breed* was running under the new NVIDIA cards, and it looked spectacular. But that's only one of the reasons we love this game. How about the gleeful way it blends genres...? The

mission-based structure takes you from squad-based tactical manoeuvres through vehicular action and space combat all the way back to trigger-happy gun-and-run carnage. Innovation? It's got more original ideas than you'd expect from ten games. Tactical shooter of the year? You never know.



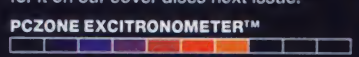
DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

■ Pub: Novalogic | Dev: Novalogic | www.novalogic.com/games/DFBHD

BLACK Hawk Down is the best-looking *Delta Force* game ever, by a long shot. And while it doesn't necessarily follow that it's going to be the best *Delta Force* game ever, we feel pretty confident that it will. For a start, Novalogic is working hard to ensure that the single-player game is just as strong as the multiplayer this time

around, and has introduced a much more cinematic flavour to the action as a result. Taking its cue from *Medal Of Honor*, you'll see grand set pieces, multiple objectives, control of vehicles and mounted guns, and both close-quarters battling and sniping. All the missions and tactics employed are based on information from ex-Special

Ops guys, so authenticity should be high throughout. You might have had a bit of a taste of the action with the multiplayer demo released a few months back, but the proper demo is on its way soon – look for it on our cover discs next issue.



Get some, get some!

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

ETA
Feb
2003

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Ubi Soft Montreal | www.raven-shield.com

SWAT's all the fuss about then?

IT SEEMS we've been waiting an age for a new *Rainbow Six* title, but based on our latest playtest at least it will have been worthwhile. Almost unrecognisable from the hideous angular beast of yesteryear – not in vain does it use the omnipresent *Unreal* technology – *Raven Shield* attempts to bring the team-based tactical shooter to the masses.

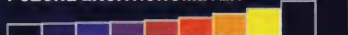
Gone is the complicated, vector-filled planning screen, replaced with an intuitive and altogether more functional one that features 3D representations of the levels you are about to enter. You will also be able to give commands on the move (like you could in *SWAT 3*), so you can constantly adapt to new situations.

Most of you will be glad to hear that, without dropping an ounce of its trademark realism, the action will be much more accessible and fun, and closer to a traditional shooter than previous titles. Proof of this is the option to display your weapon on screen (rather than the disembodied reticule of other *RS* games), although any attempt to bulldoze your way past enemies will result in instant death.

Another thing to get excited about is the cool gadgetry you can play with,

like the thermal vision scope that lets you see bodies through walls and the heartbeat detector. There's little doubt that *Rainbow Six* is about to reclaim the tense, tactical shooter throne.+

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Judging from the rotary diopter sight, that's an MP5 9mm... Oh God. Must. Stop. Playing shooting games.



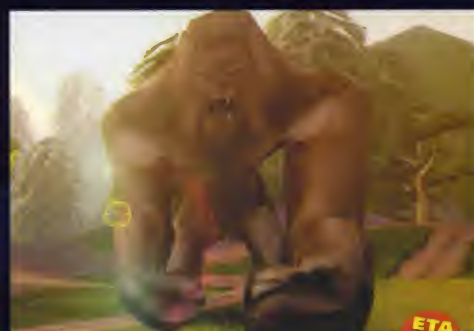
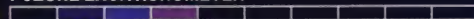
ETA
Er...
2003

SWAT: URBAN JUSTICE

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Sierra | swatuj.sierra.fr/en/

WE GET the terrible feeling that the fourth entry in the *SWAT* series has gone the way of *Duke Nukem*, as things have gone eerily quiet on this game lately. However, we've always had a soft spot for the *SWAT* games and their strictly urban brand of tactical action, and the last we saw of the game, with its new engine, new tactical interface and focus on gangland violence, it was looking great. We'll keep you posted.

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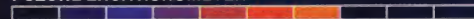
ETA
March
2003

SAVAGE

■ Pub: iGames | Dev: S2 Games | www.s2games.com

REAL-TIME strategy rules! No, we love first-person shooting! Oh, screw it – we can't decide. Luckily, S2 Games will render the issue moot with an immensely intriguing and unique multiplayer genre hybrid. Tactically minded participants can play as a commander, operating from a *Warcraft III*-type view while brain-dead bruisers can simply hop into the action first-hand. It's the best of both worlds.

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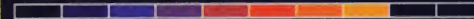
ETA
Q2
2003

HIDDEN AND DANGEROUS 2

■ Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Illusion Softworks | www.hidden-and-dangerous.com

WE'VE been expecting this follow-up to one of the best 3D action/strategy games of all time for close to two years, but still there's no sign of it. Last we saw it was looking incredibly realistic and varied, with vehicles including mini-submarines and helicopters as well as jeeps and armoured cars. We're also being promised that you'll need to use your brain as much as your huge arsenal of weapons. For now, though, the wait continues.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



**101
GAMES
OF
2003**

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES



Killing this dodgy geezer shouldn't send you too far down the dark path...



Skills such as dual saber-wielding can only be gained with experience.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

**ETA
Sept
2003**

An RPG that's quicker, easier, more seductive... but will it prove more powerful?

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Bioware
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com/products/swkotor/default.htm
OUT September 2003

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- It's the first *Star Wars* role-playing game ever
- It's from RPG masters Bioware
- It's set 4,000 years before *Episode One*, allowing the developers huge freedom
- Hugely versatile combat system
- Stunning 3D worlds and glorious cinematic visuals

"**THIS IS** going to be our best game ever," states Ray Muzyka, joint CEO of Bioware Corp, during a demo of his new RPG, *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*. It's a big statement. Not only because Bioware is the world's premier producer of PC RPGs (*Baldur's Gate* ring any bells?), but because Ray is such a modest, matter-of-fact chap that you know if he says it, well, he darn well means it.

Knights Of The Old Republic is the first ever *Star Wars* RPG. It's set 4,000 years before the films, in an age when thousands of Jedi and Sith are

clashing in a giant galactic war. It's up to you to determine the outcome of the battle, for you are destined to become a powerful Jedi and have yet to choose which side to grant your allegiance...

KotOR is also one of the best-looking 3D RPGs ever created – a stunningly cinematic achievement that takes full advantage of all the latest advances in graphics tech. And while we're reeling off superlatives, it's also far and away the most accessible RPG from Bioware, now practically synonymous with beardy stat-bashing. "We understand that this is a console game as well as a PC game," explains Ray. "We wanted to find a balance between the two."

As such you'll find an easy and versatile character creation system, and a combat system that can be played out in anything from full action mode, with

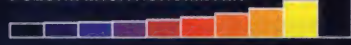
cinematic saber swinging to match *Jedi Knight II*, through to fully turn-based.

Your adventure will take you across ten planets including Tatooine and Kashyyyk, in your trusty old space bucket, the Ebon Hawk. But where *Baldur's Gate II* offered up to 200 hours of goblin-bashing fun, *KotOR* is a far more manageable 40 to 60.

A variety of mini-games have also been introduced, including turret-battles, pod-racing and a card game called Pazak, which is more than a little reminiscent of *Final Fantasy VIII*.

However, this is no *Deus Ex*-like action hybrid, and at heart, *KotOR* is still a pure RPG. There's party-based questing, complex stats, countless items to collect, force powers to learn, experience to earn. It's deep, sturdy, and if you want it to be, as hardcore as any Bioware role-player. However, it's also awesomely cinematic, instantly playable and sure to please every *Star Wars* fan out there, goblin-lover or not.

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Time to make Tusken kebab.





DEUS EX 2: INVISIBLE WAR

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Ion Storm | www.deusex2.com

The first game was close to perfection. This one could nail it

THERE ARE still precious few details on this mega-sequel, but that doesn't stop us from saying that *Deus Ex 2* will be one of the best games of 2003. Seriously, this is what PC gaming is – or should be – all about: creating a whole believable world full of depth and detail, and giving you the freedom to do almost anything you can think of in it. Oh, and let's not forget the epic story that's affected dynamically by your



actions, the choice to approach danger through stealth or action and an atmosphere so immersive you forget you're playing a game at all. And that's just the first game. *DX2: Invisible War* should be all that to the power of ten.

For starters, the latest *Unreal* technology guarantees a beautiful world and a far more fluid gaming experience. The environment will be even more interactive thanks to spot-on physics, and an impressive new shadow system will make stealth a more intuitive and viable choice.

The AI will be much better too, not only in enemies but every single living creature you meet and talk to. And talk you will, because there's three times more dialogue this time. The skills system (the RPG side of the game) is also changing, with augmentations giving way to biomods, which will be less finicky to implement. There are also black market biomods, if you want your character to have a darker edge.

Story-wise, we only know that you'll play the successor to JC Denton 20 years later, created by the same experimental laboratory, and that you'll have the choice of a male or female version of the character. And, frankly, that's all we need to know. We wouldn't want to spoil the next step in PC gaming evolution.

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ETA
Xmas
2003

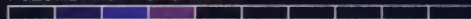


LIONHEART

■ Pub: Interplay | Dev: Reflexive Entertainment | lionheart.blackisle.com

IT MAY look like *Baldur's Gate*, but *Lionheart* has as much in common with *Fallout* as it does with the king of beardies. Rather than the typical fantasy world, the game takes place in an alternative vision of Europe. The *Fallout* influence emerges in the use of the SPECIAL system, which lets characters develop in a very open-ended, class-free way. With over 100 maps and 40 hours of gameplay, *Lionheart* should be a solid choice.

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ETA
Jan 31
2003



GOthic 2

■ Pub: JoWood | Dev: Piranha Bites | www.gothic2.com

THE ORIGINAL *Gothic* wasn't a particularly sexy title, despite being atmospheric and often beautiful, and it was soon swept under the carpet of RPG obscurity. The sequel should be a very different affair, as the developers assure us that they've acted on their criticisms. Among other things, the gaming world is three times the size and there are several different character classes. A promising second-time-lucky hit.

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ETA
Q1
2003



SEA DOGS 2

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Akella | www.akella.com/seadogs2/

THE pirate genre has fallen a bit out of fashion these days, with visions of space now tending to fill the gap left by the romance of the high seas, but here at PC ZONE we still feel the tug of the sea from time to time. And if it's pirates you want, there's only one game worth a sniff of salt – *Sea Dogs 2* from nautical masters Akella. It's as good-looking as stable-mate *Morrowind* and just as open-ended, so start buffing your peg-leg now.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



ETA
Late
2003



Hold out your hands and close your eyes...



There will be less locations, but with more detail and a greater replayability factor.



**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



Could this be the definitive version of the best footy management game ever?

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 4

■ Pub: Eidos | Dev: Sports Interactive | www.sigames.com

For some, it's the only game that really matters

**ETA
Feb
2003**



Chester on top form as usual.

CHAMPIONSHIP Manager divides the gaming community like nothing else, and that love/hate relationship rings true within the rarefied confines of the PC ZONE office. Whereas Woods, Korda, Holden and Pratchett won't have it in the house, visionaries such as Steve Hill (*who wrote this muck? - Ed*), the other Hill, Shoemaker and Pullin are all dedicated followers. Spot the difference between the two groups? The first lot are deskbound automatons (*does not compute - Ed*), whereas the latter bunch are freelancers, with hours of gnawing emptiness to fill. The point is, it's almost impossible to hold down a job and apply yourself fully to the game. February should bring bad news for employers then, as CM4 looks set to cut deep into the heart of industry.

Aficionados may balk at the all-new 2D match engine, but it will be

complemented by the traditional text commentary, and Sports Interactive is keen to stress that the purity of the game will remain intact. As head of development Marc Vaughan says, "Regardless of how we portray it, there will always be one simulation. We simulate a football match."

Elsewhere, a host of new features are being added, and the interface has had a fairly drastic re-design. We hesitate to use the words 'dumbing down' but there is a definite feeling that CM4 is a concerted effort to become a piece of genuine mainstream entertainment. Just think of it - dedicated Sims-ers dropping their home-making kits in favour of a hardcore text-based sports simulation. At that prospect alone, we're truly excited.





BLACK & WHITE 2

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Lionhead | www.bwgame.com

PC ZONE goes bipolar with excitement

ETA
Q4
2003

SLAPPING giant apes might not have been everyone's idea of fun, but *Black & White*'s ambition and innovations in AI made it one of the most important games ever released. It was probably one of the buggiest too, but Lionhead supremo Peter Molyneux has spoken many times of his regret in

that department, so expect a healthy period of extermination before the sequel hits the streets.

When it does though, it will likely blast a hole in the asphalt and send pieces of pavement flying in all directions. That's how big it's gonna be. As the chaps at Lionhead have not only

listened very carefully to all the criticisms of *B&W*, acknowledging mistakes and correcting them, they're also taking it to a whole different level.

Graphic-hounds can look forward to some sublime engine changes, allowing a much more realistic world environment and impressive amounts of detail. But

Martin Korda goes on one of his rampages again.

it's the gameplay that counts, and *B&W2* shouldn't disappoint.

The main change is that it's going to be much more bellicose, with whole civilisations at war, staging frighteningly large battles. You're still a god though, and along with the decision of being good (working towards peace as you build up a legendary society) or bad (wiping out all other forms of life as you struggle for violent supremacy), you can become involved in the war personally, through spells or via your creature. Add technological advances and side-stories and you have the ultimate god game.

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REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

■ Pub: Eidos | DEV: Elixir Studios | www.elixir-studios.co.uk

Who's going to be first against the wall?

ETA
Q3
2003



IF YOU'RE not aware of *Republic*, brainchild of whiz kid development prodigy Demis Hassabis (responsible for *Theme Park* and a cohort of Peter Molyneux on *Black & White*), then you'd better start paying more attention in class. Take it from us – it's one of the most ambitious games in development at the moment, if not ever.

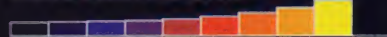
Republic sets out to simulate an entire country and its literally hundreds of thousands of inhabitants (just shy of a million we're told) in glorious, detailed 3D. In the mid-'80s Soviet-style state of Novistrana, you play the little man with the big plan – the achievement of total power. In your way stands a president desperate to hang on to power, as well as other factions also looking for a slice of the pie. From roadsweepers to archbishops, from filmstars to generals, it's

up to you to bully, bribe, brainwash and blackmail people into joining your cause to bring about a revolution in your name.

Each of the strata in the society of Novistrana needs co-opting to some degree. The working classes are a strong source of muscle, important for building up a private army and intimidating the opposition; the middle classes hold the majority of the wealth, which you need to finance operations and ensnare the business sector; and the upper classes provide influence in the media and other outlets.

Ambitious, innovative and packed full of commies – we've got a sneaking feeling this is going to be very special indeed.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



101 GAMES OF 2003



You'll be able to post trailers of your films online. And show everyone what an abject failure you are.

THE MOVIES

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Lionhead | www.themoviesgame.com

The Theme Park of the 21st century....

CONSIDER THIS. Why do we spend so much time managing zoos, theme parks, airports, hotels and holiday resorts when the real thing is so supremely dull? And how much better would it be if you ran the most interesting business of all: show business? That's the idea Peter Molyneux had and, you've got to admit, it's a winner.

Not that *The Movies* is simple or derivative. This is Lionhead after all. You don't just build sets, hire film crews and actors. You actually have a hand in creating the films themselves. First of all by deciding what genre it's going to be (western, war, love...) and then tweaking the levels of romance, violence and realism. If you up the violence, you'll see the actors bashing at



ETA
Q3
2003



each other comically, but slide the realism bar all the way up as well and you'll see a pretty nasty bone-crunching, bloody mess. The same goes for romance, but keep in mind that you start the game in the 1920's, and close-up triple penetration isn't going to draw the crowds. As you progress through the years, you'll be able to research new technologies (Smell-o-vision anyone?), branch out into new genres (sci-fi for example) and try to get away with more risky content. Now, you can't recreate *The Godfather* in *Deep Sea Tycoon*, can you?

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



That'll teach you to build your city next to Mount Etna...

SIMCITY 4

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Maxis | simcity.ea.com

Hot town, summer in the SimCity

THE SIMCITY games have been famous for having a constant style of gameplay in slightly different packaging. The first was a 2D revolution and no one could argue with the isometric beauty of the second. The third

however, was barely even evolutionary, and it's been left to this fourth instalment to take the series into the 3D world where it so rightly belongs.

Once again the underlying gameplay is much the same as the

previous games, with the object being to create and run every aspect of a thriving metropolis, from providing amenities to fixing taxes to sending your citizens to work smiling. Sadly, the 3D environment doesn't contain a free-roaming camera - instead you'll be able to zoom in and out and rotate the camera through several fixed positions.

Instead of working your way through pre-set scenarios, the emphasis of *SimCity 4* is on the simple challenge of building and developing your city at your own pace, though even with your mini army of helpers, graphs and gadgets, this will be no easy task. *SimCity 4* also gives a little massage to Maxis' other big franchise, *The Sims*, with the option of importing your *Sims* characters to live in your city and provide feedback on your progress. The amount of detail is phenomenal and *SimCity 4* should see workplaces across the world grinding to a halt in much the same way the first one did.

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Woooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!



From the maker of *Hungry Horace* - it must be good.

GHOST MASTER

■ Pub: Empire | Dev: Sick Puppies | www.ghostmaster.co.uk/

ETA
Q1
2003

THE answer to every *Sims*-hater's prayers is here: *Ghost Master* could be described as the anti-*Sims*, a game where instead of facilitating the hopes and dreams of cute suburban households you get to turn them into places of terror and dampened sheets by training up a team of ghosts to strike fear into the hearts of mortals.

With mission-based gameplay in a variety of haunted locales, *Ghost Master* boasts a full 3D engine that even had Maxis drooling when they caught sight of it. This could be the most diabolical fun since *Dungeon Keeper 2*.

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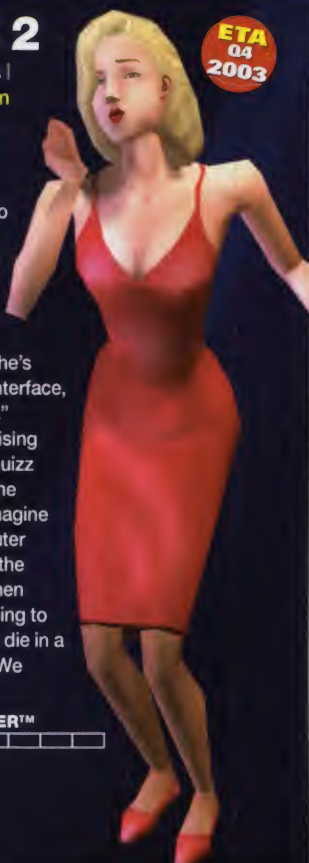
THE SIMS 2

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Maxis | www.thesims.ea.com

ETA
Q4
2003

"IT HASN'T been announced yet," says EA whenever we ask them about the proper sequel to the game that just won't stop selling. But we know better, as the inevitable *Sims 2* has already been confirmed by Will Wright. Rather underwhelmingly, he's promised "a new player interface, new graphics and new AI." Nothing particularly surprising there, but have a quick squizz at page 116, the bit with the facial expressions, and imagine those on your little computer people, in full 3D. Picture the hurt and bewilderment when they realise that you're going to wall them up and let them die in a pool of their own faeces. We can't wait. No, really.

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AGE of MYTHOLOGY™

From the creators of *Age of Empires*[®]
and *The Age of Kings*[™]

Unleash the wrath of the gods

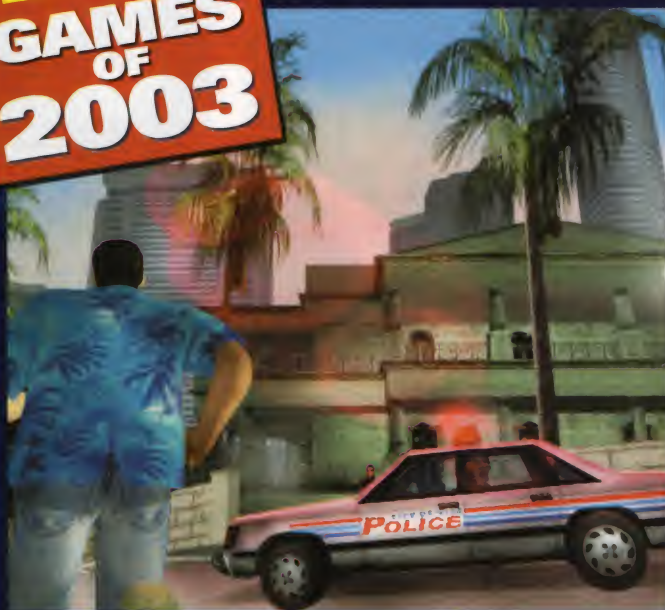
Enter a world where legends live on and the will of the gods decide the fate of mortal men. Build majestic temples, farm the fertile valleys, and seek out wealth in distant realms. Join brave heroes in the greatest battles of mythology, from the walls of Troy to the gates of the Underworld. Summon mighty minotaurs to smash enemy citadels, or call down fire from the skies. *The choice is yours.*

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www.agemythology.co.uk

101 GAMES OF 2003



Shades of Falling Down.



ETA
Feb
2003

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3

■ Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | www.codemasters.com

SO, *Colin McRae Rally 3*. Late again? Yes. Ho-hum. Still, it should be worth the wait, as it's looking a class apart. Possibly the best feature is the new career mode, which allows you to guide Colin on a stellar career from unknown also-ran to majestic champion. Car physics have also been revamped, with cars reacting with incredible realism no matter what the weather or terrain. In short, another genre-topping classic from Codies.

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GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

ETA
Q1
2003

■ Pub: Take 2 | Dev: Rockstar North | www.rockstargames.com/vicecity

Twice as big, twice as bad. Ten times as fly

SELLING over six million copies and gaining huge acclaim for its open-ended shooting 'n' driving gameplay, *Grand Theft Auto III* could only be called a phenomenon. Developer DMA Design – recently renamed Rockstar North – has now created *GTA: Vice City*, a glorious celebration of kitsch '80s culture replete with cool cars, sexy women, drug gangs and poodle rock.

Vice City follows the exploits of lead character Tommy Vercetti – voiced by *Goodfellas* actor Ray Liotta – as he begins his rise to the top of the criminal tree. There are far

more vehicles than before, including the long-anticipated addition of motorcycles, which let you zip in and out of traffic and throw you off painfully if you crash. You can also steal various boats, remote-controlled vehicles and best-of-all, helicopters, which give you fantastic views of Vice City as well as allowing you to slice people up with the deadly spinning blades.

Vice City also manages to improve on the mission variety in *GTA3*, even adding indoor locations such as cheesy nightclubs. You'll still be able to complete the taxi, police and ambulance missions of the previous game, along with the all-new pizza deliveries. Other highlights include a murderous rampage with a buggy on a golf course, protecting your crew in a Haitian drug deal and brutally carving through

traitorous gang members with a chainsaw. Another smart addition is the taxi that waits outside a police station or hospital, always ready to take you back to the last mission if you're busted or wasted.

Graphically, Rockstar has perfectly captured the 1986 *Miami Vice* look, with neon-lit buildings on streets lined with palm trees. Characters wear clothes from the period, so you'll see pedestrians with "Relax" T-shirts and gangsters sporting pastel shirts and white jackets with the sleeves rolled up. Add to that a magnificent collection of seven comedy radio stations playing more than 80 classic tunes from the period and you have an ultraviolent sequel that's set to surpass the original in every way. In a word: fresh.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



ETA
Q3
2003

DRIVER 3

■ Pub: Infogrames | Dev: Reflections | www.driver3.com

ANYONE who came in contact with the classic that was *Driver* will know why we're so excited about this sequel. The original 3D crime-driving game owed a great deal to the *Grand Theft* games, but did it in a less cartoonish, more cinematic style. The new game is going to offer gun-toting as well as driving sections, and if it can retain its grittier, more realistic edge, it has every chance of beating *GTA* at its own game. Again.

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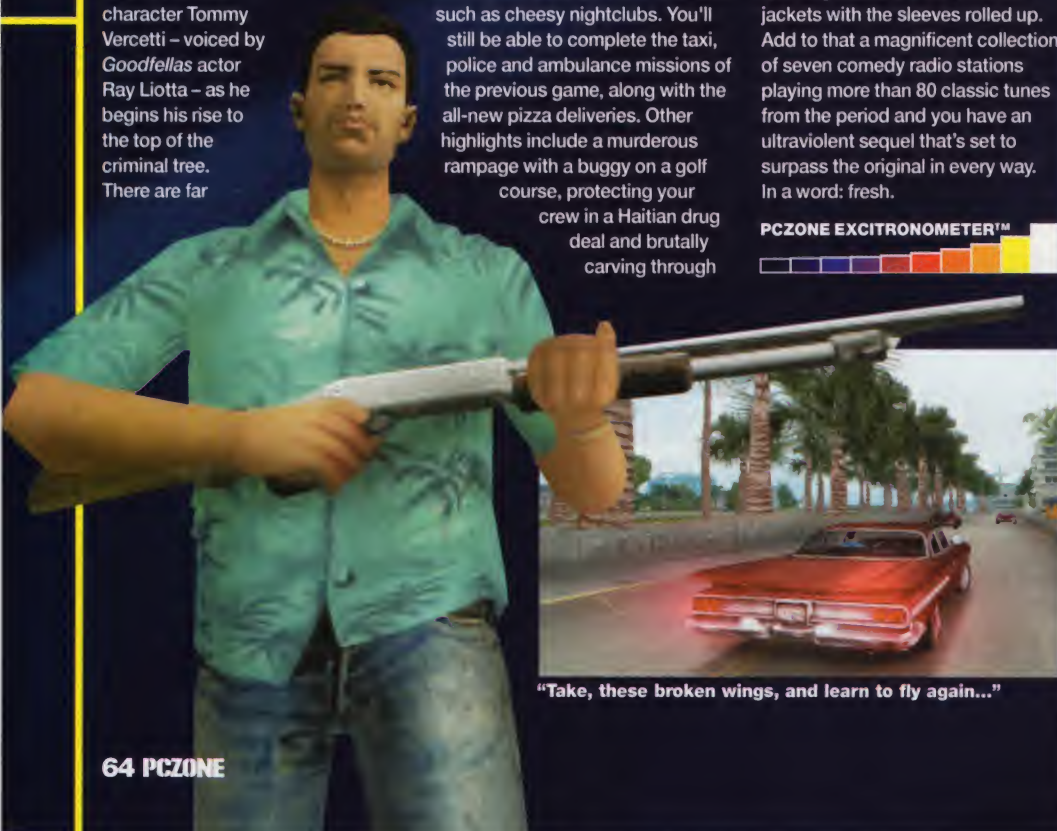
ETA
March
2003

TOCA RACE DRIVER

■ Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters | www.codemasters.com

FOR SO long the runner-up to *Colin McRae*, Codemasters' other driving game series, *TOCA*, is finally about to come into its own with this dazzling sequel. It's not only high on detail, both under the bonnet and behind the wheel, but sets itself apart from other racers with its truly engaging storyline. The off-track antics of your character create a thrilling *Days Of Thunder*-inspired yarn, sure to keep your motor runnin'.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



"Take, these broken wings, and learn to fly again..."



Always check your blind spot.



"Bogey at, um, what's the time when the big hand's on the 12..."



New ships, new water effects and new, er, splashy bits make for much more convincing naval battles.

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: 1C Maddox Games | www.il2sturmovik.com

Oleg Maddox is at it again with some more *IL-2* shenanigans

ORIGINALLY BILLED

as an add-on pack for *IL-2 Sturmovik*, *Forgotten Battles* has now turned into a full-blown sequel. And fair enough too. The game boasts 20 single and ten multiplayer missions covering both the Finnish and Hungarian theatres of combat during World War II. It jazzes up the flight model, reworks the entire AI, creates vastly improved terrain (sea that actually looks like sea!), and adds a load of new planes (Brewster Buffalo, Hurricane and P47 Thunderbolt to

name but three). Plus, both the 109 and JU87 series have been extended and the AI given a bigger pool of aircraft too.

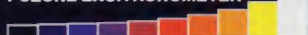
There's also scope for players to go for the medals and glory. The existing Russian and German rankings and awards are being extended to include both the Finnish and Hungarian military command. Huzzah!

The development work isn't just above-ground either – it's in the sea as well. Three new ships are being added, modelled to the nth degree, and sinking them will be difficult.

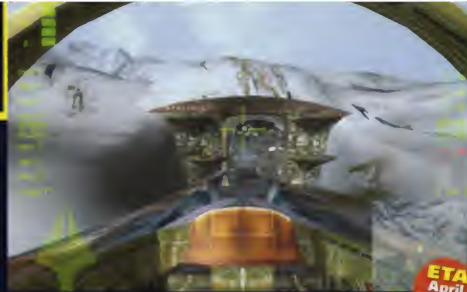
But that's not all! Rumours abound that the final game will have searchlights, barrage balloons and an engine management system corresponding to the modelled aircraft type, which will include the use of radiators, superchargers and fuel mixture controls when necessary at different altitudes.

This all may sound a little spoddy, but it's enough to make a fully developed propellerhead throw back his flaxen locks and cry: 'Oh thank you God, never again will I...' Er... I've said too much.

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Repeat after us: Best Flight Sim. Ever.

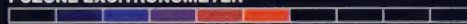


ECHELON: WIND WARRIORS

■ Pub: Oxygen Interactive | Dev: MADia | www.buka.com/game/Game_8.htm

DESPITE OUR esteem for *IL-2* and the like, many of us here at *ZONE* actually aren't that interested in realistic flight models and accurate fuel mixtures, preferring something a little more... well, let's just say 'exhilarating'. Little surprise then, that we heartily enjoyed the futuristic airborne action of 2001's excellent *Echelon*. The super-enhanced sequel is on its way, and it looks about, ooh, twice as good as the original.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



LOCK-ON

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Eagle Dynamics | www.lo-mac.com

LOCK-ON is set in and around the Black Sea region and depicts a hypothetical conflict between the former USSR and NATO – with aircraft from the early 1990s to current prototype aircraft scheduled to enter service over the next few years. It's graphically pleasing stuff, and while locking-on a missile from 20 miles, pressing fire then running off doesn't sound fun, we're hoping the developers can inject a bit of excitement.

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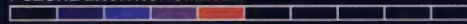


YAGER

■ Pub: THQ | Dev: Yager Developments | www.yager-game.com

MORE SCI-FI shooter than flight sim, *Yager* is an aerial combat game that keeps the adrenaline high and you close to the ground. You are Magnus Tide, a man with only 20 levels to save the world. Of course you can also expect a strong multiplayer game and a generic storyline. The reason we're so excited is that it looks glorious – so you'll soon be too busy rolling your eyeballs back in to worry about the plot anyway.

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activision.com



It's the good old 'amnesiac hero searching for his past' story again.



FREELANCER

■ Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Digital Anvil |

www.microsoft.com/games/PC/freelancer.asp

Missing: one epic, free-form space combat sim...

OK, this is getting beyond a joke. Do you see us laughing? No you don't. That's because this has gone well beyond being amusing, right the way through to just being tragic. And as *Freelancer* approaches its fifth anniversary of development, we can only slump back in resignation, sigh, and speculate about when this space epic will finally see the light of day. Someone somewhere said March, although whether they meant 2003 or 2012 is anyone's guess.

Thankfully, the game does exist. We've seen it. With our own eyes. So calm down space combat fans, you haven't been abandoned by the great Digital Anvil just yet.

Boasting a revolutionary new control system which (and you may want to sit down at this point) actually works (steady), you'll be able to control every aspect of your ship with just a mouse. But before all you joystick pummellers out there start panicking, relax – it's a good thing. You see, they've

implemented this new system to get more people into the genre, and that's only going to lead to bigger and better games in the future.

The open-ended universe will allow you to fly around the solar system at will, pursuing a myriad of occupations on behalf of one of 50 different factions, dipping into the finely crafted story as and when you feel the urge. The multiplayer side of the game promises to allow you and 15 of your mates to fly around an ever-evolving universe, and carving out a reputation for yourselves. Online of course.

We can't wait, and we're sure you can't either. But wait we must. And wait, and wait and wait and wait and... I think you get the picture. Still looks like being brilliant, though.

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ELITE 4

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Frontier | www.frontier.co.uk

David Braben and Ian Bell's *Elite* is still the classic space shooting/trading game, regularly popping up in gamers' all-time favourite top ten lists. *Elite* spawned a couple of less successful sequels, but David Braben is now working on a 21st-century *Elite* that he promises will "feel more like *Elite* than *Frontier*." Single

and multiplayer versions have been mooted, as well as detailed planet surfaces viewable from orbit and the ability to land on planets. The granddaddy of immersive 3D space blasters is about to return... we just don't know when.

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X2: THE THREAT

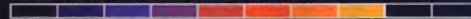
■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Egosoft | www.egosoft.com/x/

ETA
Late
2003

Elite 4 may be waiting on the outer reaches of the solar system, but Egosoft's *X2* is a 3D space trader/blaster that could enter Earth's atmosphere first and steal the title of "21st-century *Elite*".

Set 20 years after the first game, *X: Beyond The Frontier*, *X2* takes place in a universe threatened by The Khaak, a brutal race of aliens waging war against all humans. This means you'll be able to enjoy all the usual trading elements as well as take up missions against The Khaak to gain money and new technology. With more than 60 craft available to fly, loads of cool weapons and a huge universe to explore with eye-sizzling visuals, *X2: The Threat* could be a very bright star indeed.

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ETA
????
2003

**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



That's one big womp rat.



"Trust me, it's not just a guy in a suit."



Veetcha hwankee Chewbacca.

STAR WARS GALAXIES: AN EMPIRE DIVIDED

■ Pub: Activision | Dev: Sony Online/LucasArts | www.starwarsgalaxies.com

ETA
Q3
2003

You've waited all your life for this. The wait is almost over

THE ultimate power in the online universe is almost ready to be unleashed. Once *Star Wars Galaxies* becomes fully operational you will be blown away, much like the unfortunate residents of Alderaan. Beta-testing for LucasArts' first foray into online gaming is well underway, and though many have died to bring us this information, our spies are more than a little impressed. Most who have come into direct contact with the game are, being American, keen to stress the "awesome" nature of

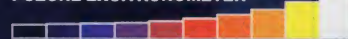
the graphics, but the really exciting news is that the game apparently manages to be accessible to online role-playing newbies without ever patronising the hardcore.

But we should back up a bit just in case a few of you are yet to become excited about this game, clearly the best reason yet to give up your day job and start a new life in the virtual realm. Set after the destruction of the first Death Star, *Galaxies* will initially offer eight different species to play as (from

Rodianan to Wookiee), with at least eight planets on which to begin your Star Wars career, this number is to grow into the teens in the months following launch. Initial planets will include Tatooine and Endor, plus a couple of worlds new to most fans (but not Alderaan, clearly). If you wish you can elect to be a droid engineer, a doctor, a musician or even a chef. However, only the most dedicated (and lucky) can ever hope to become a Jedi Knight. As to owning Speeders,

Droids, pets and houses, setting up businesses or fighting for the Empire, the answer is yes. The only thing you won't be able to do is assassinate the *Star Wars* cast or bullseye womp rats in your T-16, although you may if you're in the right place at the wrong time, find yourself holding the door open for Darth Vader, just don't expect him to thank you for it.

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It's not *EverQuest*. It's the opposite of *EverQuest*.

SHINING LORE

■ Pub: Phantagram | Dev: Phantagram | www.shininglore.com

BORED of hobgoblins and halflings? Tired of workaday dungeon-crawling and mindless levelling up? Then get ready for a world where fashion trends are just as important as questing, where you can do battle with fluffy bunnies with fists for ears and Pandas equipped with Thompson machine

guns, and where a girl with a magical frying pan is princess of a gourmet kingdom. OK, so it's not the most hardcore RPG around, but it is, despite being from Korea, the closest thing ever to a bizarre, cutie-pie Japanese RPG in massively multiplayer form. Mini-games, interior design, cooking

classes and of course action-packed real-time combat come together in a world of pastel-toned exuberance and fun. And if that appeals to you even remotely as much as it does to us, then this game is unmissable.

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ETA
Spring
2003

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

ETA
???
2003

■ Pub: VU Games | Dev: Blizzard | www.blizzard.com/wow

Forget humans vs orcs, this time it's every man, woman and dwarf for himself

BY our calculation, there are 100-odd massively multiplayer online games currently in development. And no doubt many more that haven't been announced yet. Of these, most will never see the light of day. The market for online smiting just isn't big enough, and besides, a lot of them are crap. (Just for fun, let's name a few: *Caeron 3000*, *Ages Of Athiria*, *Frontier 1859*, *Gladius Online*...)

By the same token, there are very few online games that are guaranteed success. This, however, is one of them, partly due to the fact that Blizzard games are played religiously in the heartland of online gaming (South Korea), and partly because Blizzard is a guarantee of painstaking, polished-to-a-shine quality.

What's more, Blizzard's first venture into the massively multiplayer arena is probably its best looking game ever.

The game-world has a brilliantly solid and chunky feel to it and a cheerful, cartoonish quality accentuated by jaunty angles and the trademark bold colour scheme. The sheer imagination in the creature design is also brilliant. Forget spiders and skeletons – here you're talking giant fish, dinosaurs, razor-clawed scarecrows. It's still a traditional fantasy world at its core, but handled with such creative

abandon and humour that it has none of the po-faced tedium of many fantasy games.

The gameplay may still be straight down the line questing, levelling and item-collecting, but unlike most of the fantasy worlds being built out there, this is one we can't wait to explore.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



You're going to catch a chill in that love.



Seems like a trustworthy enough fellow.



Another exciting Trivia Night at PC ZONE's local.

EVERQUEST II

■ Pub: Sony Online Entertainment | Dev: Verant Interactive | www.everquest2.station.sony.com

The king of online role-players is back. Prepare to lose your life all over again...

IT'S news to no one that *EverQuest* took the online world by storm. The first fully 3D online role-playing game, complete with goblins, orcs and all the other ne'er do wells that frequent games of this type, it knocked *Ultima Online* off its pedestal and has been growing ever since. The market is more crowded now, and everyone wants to take a swing at the champ, but things look unlikely to change when *EQ2* is released at the end of next year. The disbelief-inspiring graphics already have the EQ community drooling, and thousands more converts are sure to follow.

Key features include a revamped character development system, whereby you can choose different paths of development as you advance, rather than being stuck with the specialised class you chose when you first joined the game and had no idea what you were doing. You'll also be able to own your own real estate and even lead a thoroughly peaceful life, as you can now advance your character through trades instead of combat, which is sure to prove popular given the number of keen tradesmen in the current game.

Verant is also promising the opportunity to affect the development of the gameworld through your actions, but of course all persistent-world games promise this and none deliver. But who knows...

We'll be getting our hands on early code for *EverQuest 2* in the very near future, but for now, rest assured this game is going to be bigger than your mum's pants.

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ETA
Late
2003

Graphics to die for. Though let's hope no one takes that too literally.

**101
GAMES
OF
2003**



We're sure dragons are meant to be bigger than that...

ASHERON'S CALL II

■ Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Turbine Entertainment | www.turbinegames.com

The world of Dereth is in ruins. Guess who gets to fix it?

DESPITE being a rather peculiar-looking game with an indifferent online community, the original *Asheron's Call* gained a large and loyal following. The sequel is now just around the corner, and from what we've seen in the beta test it's going to be absolutely brilliant. Far from a mere upgrade, the entire game has been rebuilt from the ground up, from the stunning graphics engine right through to the gameplay mechanics and a whole new approach to how players relate to each other. Microsoft has rectified everything that

was lacking in the original game, as well as adding a host of new features never seen in any game before.

Upon entering *Asheron's Call II: Fallen Kings* (to give it its full name), you discover that the world of Dereth has been destroyed by unknown forces, and its many cities laid to waste. You're responsible for rebuilding the towns and repairing buildings so they can be used once again to produce valuable items.

This is unique in the world of online RPGs, and is certain to inspire a very strong player community. Everyone will

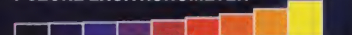
have to work together to build forges to produce weapons and armour, and generally restore towns to their former glory. Needless to say, control of the towns will be hotly contested when some strong guilds appear.

The standard routine of 'kill some monsters, get experience' still applies, but Microsoft will be monitoring what players are doing in the game, and if they see certain areas where people are killing the same things over and over to get a valuable item (as happens in all online RPGs), they'll introduce new

buildings of interest in the vicinity to encourage players to branch out into new and different quests.

From our experiences with the game thus far, *Asheron's Call II* looks to have got everything right. It has all the necessary tools to provide a living, breathing world that pleases both casual players and power gamers, and while *EverQuest II* may be in the works, *AC2* is perfectly set to get the jump on it.

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PLANETSIDE

■ Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Sony Online Entertainment | planetside.station.sony.com

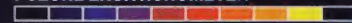
WAR – what is it good for? Fragging friends and laughing as their bloody corpses twitch, naturally. Say hello to the world's first skill-based massively multiplayer online FPS. *Planetside* is a sci-fi shooter from Sony Online, where it shares stable space with the like of

EverQuest II and *Star Wars Galaxies*. Trigger-happy gamers ply their trade in a persistent online universe populated by thousands of players. Weapons,

vehicles, land/air battles... no matter if pure action or squad-based tactical combat is your preference, it's all present and accounted for. Happily, no matter the season, battle rages on, as three Empires vie for control of ten continents 24/7.

Fancy *Unreal Tournament 2003*? Now picture its deliciously malicious mayhem captured on an earthshaking scale, with no end to the slaughter in sight. In a word: genius. Watch this space for a full hands-on preview.

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ETA
Spring
2003



EARTH AND BEYOND

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Westwood |
www.earthandbeyond.ea.com

Massively-multiplayer games are complicated beasts, requiring hours of free time just to learn the basics. Despite their popularity however, most people wouldn't go near them with a 10ft poleaxe. Westwood's *Earth & Beyond* is a little different, in that it's not only set in outer space with nary a goblin in sight, but is deceptively simple to learn and master. You choose one of three races (each a specialist in space combat, exploration or trade) and your aim is to gather experience in each of the three areas according to your deeds. Sell goods at a profit, vanquish your foes in combat or race through the backwaters of space and you gain experience points in the relevant discipline. Out already in the US, reports are positive; and while the combat is said to be too simplistic, it seems space is most certainly the place.

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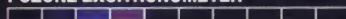
THE SIMS ONLINE

■ Pub: EA | Dev: Maxis |
www.ea.com/eagames/official/thesimsonline

It was only a matter of time before the most successful gaming franchise in the known universe sowed its seeds online. This time there's much more of a 'you are the Sim' feeling, with players not only able to build and furnish their homes, but also start up their own businesses, interact with other players and build up communities. Whether this new angle gives the series credibility with hardcore gamers or the game just becomes a glorified chatroom remains to be seen.

Interestingly, *The Sims Online* is already set to become a highly political space. Deals with the likes of McDonalds have many gamers planning online protests, a trend which could prove more interesting than the game itself. However, the one thing we can safely say is... this is going to be huge.

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SHADOWBANE

■ Pub: Swing! | Dev: Wolfpack Studios |
shadowbane.ubisoft.com

We thought this MMORPG had disappeared forever, but it turns out it was only in hibernation, honing itself and its great ambitions before it joins the battle for the hearts and money of online gamers. What makes *Shadowbane* a little different from the other MMORPGs out there is that it's attempting to combine the usual RPG elements with more strategic gameplay. Your decisions as a player not only affect the development of your character, but also the political and tactical landscape of the game, forcing players to group together to battle for territories and the spoils of war. It certainly sounds like a solid direction – blending the large scale social clashes and sieges of *Lineage* with the more traditional character-focussed role-playing of *Everquest*. If they pull it off it could be tremendous.

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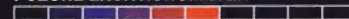


EVE: THE SECOND GENESIS

■ Pub: Simon & Schuster | Dev: CCP Games |
www.eve-online.com

Greed is good, and to prove it here's a massively multiplayer space flight simulation based around combat, exploration and – above all else – getting paid. Don't be fooled by the gorgeous graphics and simplistic interface. With 1100-plus items up for grabs, and every one of them built by players, it's every conman for himself. Luckily, you don't have to give up your day job to compete; the skill-based gameplay is engineered for casual users, and lets you train and grow in stature even when logged off. Not that the hardcore will be disappointed: a delicious blend of sci-fi sensibilities scattered across five races and a massive cosmos should be enough fun for everyone. *EVE* is a gorgeous space role-player without the total life commitment, and it should be a winner.

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CITY OF HEROES

■ Pub: NCSoft | Dev: Cryptic Studios |
www.cityofheroes.com

While there's nothing quite as good as being a Jedi, being a superhero comes a close second, and though there's at least one other online superhero game on the way (from Marvel), the first to arrive will be this game, *City Of Heroes*. Set in Paragon City, a modern day metropolis populated by superheroes, super villains and alien invaders, *City Of Heroes* allows you to create your own superhero from scratch, choosing strengths, skills and powers to develop in party-based or solo missions.

It's a stunning creation as well, with a perfectly realised American comicbook aesthetic and a towering cityscape to play in. There's also the option of designing your own costume, so that spandex pink and lemon yellow crotch-zipped creation you've always dreamt of could soon be within your reach.

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DRAGON EMPIRES

■ Pub: Codemasters | Dev: Codemasters |
www.codemasters.com/dragonempires

Codemasters jumps on the online bandwagon with a traditional fantasy title boasting literally shitloads of dragons. Particularly of note is the terrain engine, which allows vast environments to be piped down the narrowest of dial-up connections. Curiously, humans are the only playable race in the game, and there's no class selection. Instead, you define how your character progresses as you make your way through the game, and you can choose different skill sets at a later stage should you decide you've cocked things up. Visually *Dragon Empires* is well in there with the competition, and it could end up being the preferred choice for the bandwidth-challenged role-player.

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FINAL FANTASY XI

■ Pub: TBC | Dev: Square Soft |
www.squaresoft.com

Love 'em or loathe 'em, the *Final Fantasy* games are, well, bloody brilliant. [I detect a certain bias here... -Ed] At least, number VII was. *Final Fantasy VIII* was a bit slow and IX we skipped completely, but FFX was absolutely gorgeous, despite not coming to PC. The next entry in the series – once again related to the others only by style, atmosphere and the existence of chocobos – is to be a massively multiplayer affair, and as such a marked departure from the rigidly scripted games we're used to. It's already launched in Japan, where it's been praised as both absorbing and graphically stunning. Which is, after all, what *Final Fantasy* is all about. We're still waiting for confirmation on European PC launch dates, but if it happens you can guarantee we'll be there.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™



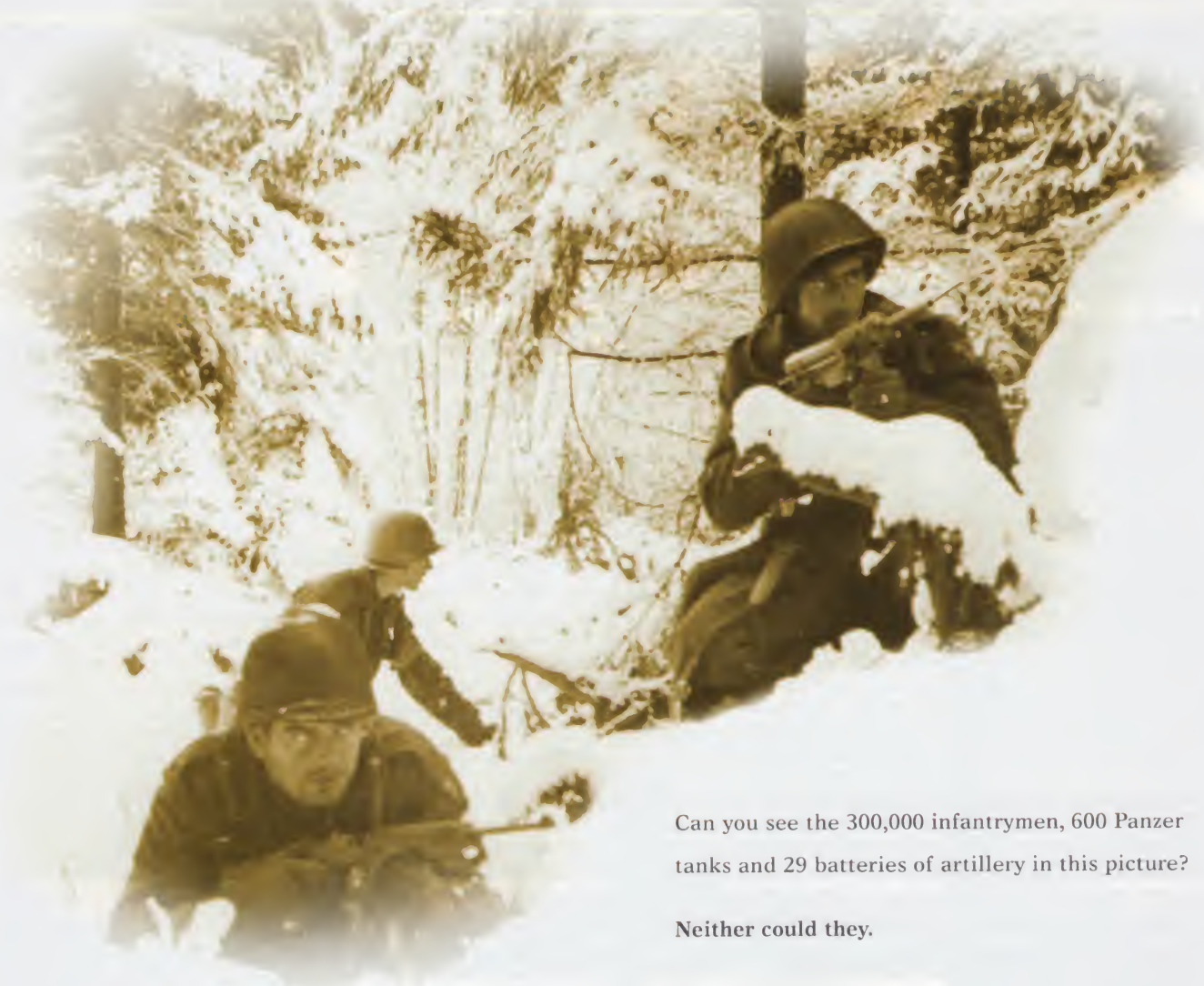
LINEAGE II: THE CHAOTIC CHRONICLE

■ Dev: NC Soft | Pub: NC Soft |
www.lineage2.com

Last but by no means least, this game could eclipse every other title featured here in terms of popularity; the sequel to the biggest online role-playing game ever, *Lineage II: The Chaotic Chronicle*. Of course much of the popularity will come from Korea, but we feel sure the rest of the world will sit up when they get a load of this gob-smacking fantasy universe. Using the latest Unreal technology, rejigged to render massive seamless environments, *Lineage II* rivals *Everquest II* for sheer visual gratification. The key features that made the first game so popular will all be retained, including a simple mouse-driven interface, magnificent siege battles and the ability to command other players through a blood pledge. One day this game will own us all.

PCZONE EXCITRONOMETER™





Can you see the 300,000 infantrymen, 600 Panzer tanks and 29 batteries of artillery in this picture?

Neither could they.

1944: The Long Road to Berlin

Jun. 6: D-Day

Since dropping behind enemy lines 3,000 ft. above Normandy, your efforts have pushed the Axis forces deep into the Ardennes forest.



Dec. 16: The Battle of the Bulge

During the worst blizzard in war history, Hitler's greatest gamble begins on a 90 mile loosely-held Allied front.



Dec. 24: The Ardennes Forest

Hold the Allied line until a break in the weather allows American and British forces to begin bombing again.



PC CD-ROM

POWERED BY game spy

nVIDIA.

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Challenge Everything™

REVIEWS

AND THAT WAS 2002



■ **REVIEWS EDITOR** Martin Korda

▲ In 2001, we awarded a measly eight **PC ZONE** Classic Awards. What a bunch of stingy bastards we were. This year, however, we've been much more generous, handing out an impressive 12 Classics. The reason behind this could be, that our spiel to PR people about how a brown envelope, stuffed full of unmarked, £50 notes makes all the difference to their game's review score, has started paying dividends. However, it could also have something to do with the past 12 months being the most exciting and successful in PC gaming history, with stunning games arriving on an almost monthly basis. I'll let you work out which of the above two reasons explains the rash of 90+ review scores, and which one is an unashamed load of bollocks (note – if you're about to dob me in for being on the take, then there's a couple of those 50s here with your name on them. OK old buddy?). Moving swiftly on...

So I suppose you want to know what these 12 stunners were then? What, you mean you can't remember? You mean to say you haven't been lovingly storing your past 13 issues of **PC ZONE** in airtight bags after committing to memory their every word and review score? Really? REALLY? Errrrr, neither have I. Honest.

However, I have waded through the last 13 issues and here's the list of the top 12 games of 2002. *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* (94%), *Warrior Kings* (90%), *Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast* (91%), *Grand Theft Auto III* (95%), *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* (94%), *Neverwinter Nights* (91%), *Soldier Of Fortune II: Double Helix* (92%), *Mafia* (92%), *Medieval: Total War* (90%), *No One Lives Forever 2* (93%), *Unreal Tournament 2003* (90%) and *Age Of Mythology* (90%). And if you've checked out our Top 101 Games of 2003 feature, you'll know that the year ahead is looking every bit as promising. Which leaves just one question. What the f*** is a Helix?



Middle Earth is on the brink of destruction in this game of the hit movie. But is it any good? Turn to page 76 to find out.



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly game publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic. Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA 2003*. We know that occasionally

you might disagree with us but we're big enough to take criticism. You can email your thoughts to letters@pczone.co.uk, or get them off your chest instantly on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk. If you think you can do better then why not send us a review – if it's good enough we'll print it in the magazine.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print we won't second guess how the game's going to play online. Instead you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

MEET THE TEAM



DAVE WOODS

Soldier Of Fortune 2

What are you currently playing?

What was your top game of 2002?

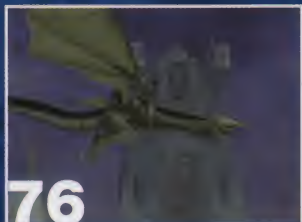
Grand Theft Auto III



JAMIE SEFTON

Medieval: Total War and Unreal Tournament 2003

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault



76

LOTR: FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING Save middle earth



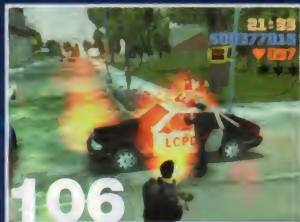
102

RE-RELEASES Older games get a re-release



104

UPDATES Patches and multiplayer reviews



106

SUPERTEST Battle of the crime games

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

76 **LORD OF THE RINGS:**

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

80 **NEOCRON**

83 **TOTAL IMMERSION RACING**

84 **NEW WORLD ORDER**

86 **HAEGEMONIA**

88 **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS**

90 **PLATOON**

93 **RALLISPORT CHALLENGE**

94 **TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003**

96 **NBA LIVE 2003**

98 **DRIFT**

98 **POST MORTEM**

101 **KNIGHT RIDER: THE GAME**

101 **TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2003**

102 **RE-RELEASES**

INCLUDING COMMANDOS 2, GUNMAN CHRONICLES, SOUL REAVER 2, KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME, STARTOPIA, ANACHRONOX AND MANY MORE

104 **UPDATES**

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2 MULTIPLAYER REVIEW AND AN UPDATE REVIEW OF BATTLE REALMS (BUNDLED WITH THE NEW WINTER OF THE WOLF EXPANSION PACK)

106 **SUPERTEST**

BATTLE OF THE CRIME GAMES. GRAND THEFT AUTO III, MAFIA, KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME, HITMAN 2 AND THIEF II. WHO WILL STEAL THE TITLE?



80



84



88



MARTIN KORDA
Unreal Tournament 2003

Medieval: Total War



ANTHONY HOLDEN
Laser Squad Nemesis and Unreal Tournament 2003

Laser Squad Nemesis



RHIANNA PRATCHETT
Age Of Mythology

Neverwinter Nights



STEVE HILL
Rallisport Challenge

Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault



PAUL PRESLEY
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault

Mafia



MARK HILL
No One Lives Forever 2

Grand Theft Auto III



THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING



£29.99 | Pub: Vivendi Universal Games | Dev: Surreal Software | ETA: Out Now | www.lotr.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 64Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.5GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Is this the one game to rule them all? **Keith Pullin** wraps his cloak around him and heads east

THE LORD Of The Rings is serious business right now and all thanks to Peter Jackson. But it could have been so different. If his films had flopped like a big pile of Orc faeces, *LOTR* would have remained in the slightly geeky, cultish domain of bearded goblin lovers. Instead, we have two films (and a third on the way) which are so universally appealing, this definitive

fantasy adventure now challenges *Star Wars* in terms of merchandising spin-offs and money making potential.

BOOK 'EM PETE

Odd then that Vivendi should go to great pains to stress that *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is based on JRR Tolkien's book and is nothing to do with the film.

Legally, we have no doubt this is true – Electronic Arts is the sole owner of the licence to develop games based on the films. Yet, could it be possible that this game only appeared because the temptation to cash in on the film's success proved too much to resist? Surely not.

Despite Vivendi's vehement disclaimer, the characters in this third-person action/adventure look and sound remarkably like their film counterparts. Developer Surreal Software claims that because the book is so descriptive, similarities are unavoidable. After all, Jackson's

INPERSPECTIVE

SEVERANCE:

BLADE OF DARKNESS

Reviewed Issue 98, Score 87% If you want to play an action game where you have to think about your sword battles then *Severance* is the one. It's out on budget now too, so if you want value for money, look no further.

BLOOD OMEN 2

Reviewed Issue 116, Score 71% It's an action/adventure – it's simple and it's relatively fun. It's also got a fair few spells and special abilities to get your teeth into. Go for this if you want more variety in your third-person meandering.



One of the more challenging moments in the game.

film and this PC game derive from the same works. Well that's fair enough then – we never realised Tolkien stipulated in the text that all versions of Gandalf, celluloid or digital, must sound like Sir Ian McKellen.

TWIST AND SHOUT

Ironically, the PC incarnation of *The Fellowship Of The Ring* is a very loose interpretation of the first book. Surreal has made full use of its right to use artistic license to pep up the more pedestrian parts of the plot. This is not necessarily a bad thing and occasionally works well; collecting items in Bree to make dummies of the hobbits is acceptable; we have no problem with that. All the developer has done is read between the lines of the book to create a perfectly plausible scenario.

On the other hand, some sections of the game are so far

removed from anything you've read it's barely recognisable as the same story. Samwise Gamgee being kidnapped by a winged Nazgul for example is just plain ridiculous. Any self-respecting fan will balk at such blatant disregard for the plot – not to mention Sam's wellbeing. More importantly, if contriving action sequences means twisting the story out of all proportion then surely it's not worth making the game in the first place?

It's a shame that such outrageous tactics had to be employed because on the evidence of a couple of early levels, stealth could easily have replaced action. The stage where Frodo has to sneak away from some Black Riders by throwing stones to distract them is one of the most tense and enjoyable moments of the game. If the same amount of creativity had been employed for another 20 levels or so,

“Character models for both enemies and fellowship members are dour. Trolls look like big grey lumps of rock”



Old Man Willow is pretty much what you'd expect.

"This definitive fantasy adventure now challenges *Star Wars* in terms of money making potential"



It would have been nice if you could control Legolas as well.



BOOKED UP

DID ANYONE AT SURREAL SOFTWARE ACTUALLY READ THE BOOK?

When it comes to remaining faithful to the book there are inconsistencies in *LOTR* that are hard to fathom. On one hand, the game makes an effort to relay the events in the Old Forest as accurately as possible. It even brings Tom Bombadil and Old Man Willow into the action, and this is something the film couldn't manage. It's an admirable achievement as some might argue this is far from the most exciting part of the book.

On the flip side, there are some bizarre occurrences; Frodo gets attacked by wolves just outside Bywater, orcs shooting flaming arrows guard Weathertop, trolls appear on virtually every level, and the most ridiculous of them all – Sam gets kidnapped by a flying Nazgul.

It's surprising that Surreal had the nerve to fiddle with the plot so much. But what's even more surprising is that Tolkien Enterprises let them do it...



The Bombadil experience remains faithful to the book.



I can't remember this happening.

Even *The Ring* is useless – running away from your enemies proves just as effective as becoming invisible. Honestly, what is the point of making a *LOTR* game when *The Ring* isn't even an integral part of it? It just makes a mockery of the whole story.

FLY YOU FOOLS

Thankfully, you are not restricted to fleeing through Middle Earth as Frodo – you can also flee as Aragorn or Gandalf depending on what level you're on.

It defies belief, but even playing as the two main combat-orientated characters you can sprint through most levels, avoiding all combat and still get to the end of the stage.

gameplay could have been vastly improved. Instead, Frodo's role is reduced to running away from spiders, wolves, orcs and Uruk-hai, along with the odd bit of flower picking and searching for lost hobbits in the Old Forest.



Get a haircut you old hippy.



Where have all the hobbits gone?

If you do stop to fight, don't expect heavy resistance. By using the WASD keys to move around and then repeatedly hitting the left mouse button to swing either Aragorn or Gandalf's sword, you can quickly dispatch your foes. The ranger can also use a bow to attack. However, it's not needed and it's difficult to aim even in first-person mode.

Ultimately, there's little variation in the way you kill your enemies. The only real combat challenge comes when protecting Frodo from the nine Ringwraiths at Weathertop. In this battle you actually have to keep moving from one wraith to another as they take turns edging towards the prone Frodo. Despite not being able to kill them outright, you can

eventually drive them away after a few well placed prods with a flaming log.

Apart from that welcome respite, it's a case of left-click to continue. If you're into simple and mindless hack 'n' slash games then you might possibly forgive this monotony, but compared to the skilled cut and thrust of something like *Severance: Blade of Darkness*, the combat here is woefully basic.

To make your job even easier, the AI for the NPCs Gimli, Boromir and Legolas is impressive. They will eagerly surge into battle and dispatch easily as many enemies as you can. This rowdy trio is also indestructible; so in keeping with the whole lazy gameplay philosophy, you can just sit back and let them do the dirty work for you.

WALL TO WALL

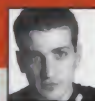
Graphically *TFOTR* is a mixed bag. Some of the environments look spectacular especially latter levels such as the Mines of Moria and the River Anduin. Others, like the Old Forest, are just a generic mix of rocks and trees that do no justice to Tolkien's epic imagination.

The camera doesn't help matters. Some of its positioning is so appalling you can't even see your character. The problem is particularly evident in Moria where the low ceilings and narrow tunnels mean you spend most of the time looking at nothing but rocks.

Character models for both enemies and fellowship members are also dour. Trolls look like big grey lumps of rock, and the attack animation for Aragorn consists of about four basic swings of the sword.

"Some of the positions the camera assumes are so appalling you can't even see your character"

Gandalf gets high on healing herbs.



SECOND OPINION

ANTHONY HOLDEN

It's a travesty. One minute we're bewildered by the number of *LOTR* options coming to the PC, the next *The Two Towers* is dropped from PC release and this game turns out to be utter toss. It's not as if I'm a bitter Tolkien fan railing against the mistreatment of his works – I haven't even read the books – but I am a fan of action/adventure/RPGs, and I do rail against the abuse of the form in the name of a quick buck.

Gandalf suffers a similar fate, with a meagre, uninspiring five spells that look like damp squibs on fireworks night and do little to promote the wizard's almighty reputation.

PURE IRRELEVANCE

At least the music and use of sound goes some way towards making up for other inadequacies. Voice acting during the cut-scenes is professional, although accents that haven't been directly based on the film are a tad strange to say the least. Merry and Pippin sound like Dorset farmers who have spent too much time in the States and the

TALK PROPER LIKE

THEY'RE COMING TO TAKE US AWAY, HA HA!

One of the endearing features of the book is the characters' ability to talk absolute nonsense whenever they get the chance. The game is no different and virtually every character is guilty at one time or another of uttering phrases of pure gobbledegook. To be fair it does add a little bit of humour to the proceedings (and let's face it, *LOTR* is not exactly noted for its comedy) and so it does offer a welcome change from the drab action that makes up the rest of the game.

Here's our top three nonsense-talking Middle Earthlings:



Coming in at number three, young Baggins and his moon talk...

"There is an inn, a merry old inn beneath an old grey hill, and there they make a stew so brown that the Man in the Moon himself flew down at night to eat his fill."



Just missing out on the top spot, Aragorn bemoans the state of elves' upper spines...

"Shall we say, a plague on elves and their stiff necks? The company shall all fare alike. Bind us all, Haldir."



And straight in at number one, Goldberry reminisces over bent seas...

"He was here before kings and barrow-wights, before the elves passed westward, and before the seas were bent. Before the Dark Lord came from outside."

MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



A little bit more of this would have been nice.

BASH ME WITH A SWORD AND CALL ME SAURON

Where do we start? Firstly, the battles should have been far more complex. You only have to play *Severance: Blade Of Darkness* to realise that sword combat doesn't have to revolve around repeatedly hitting the left mouse button until your adversary dies. Secondly, Gandalf's selection of spells should have been bigger – five is not enough for a wizard of his stature.

Finally, stealth should have played a much greater part in the game. More to the point, *The Ring* should have been woven into the gameplay far more successfully than it has. To have a *Lord Of The Rings* game where wearing The Ring isn't even essential is just unforgivable.

actor responsible for Aragorn's brooding tones obviously feels he should be playing Hamlet in the West End.

The dialogue can go on a bit too. Some of the cut-scenes near the start of the game are

full of drivel relating to optional sub-quests. These petty distractions are not in the slightest bit relevant to the main quest and serve only to provide Frodo with the opportunity to do a few good deeds for the

local hobbits of Bywater and Hobbiton and thus increase his 'purity' rating. All this effectively does is allow young Baggins to wear The Ring for longer before succumbing to the will of Sauron. It's a hollow gesture and one that's not worth wasting your time on, because like we said, there's no need to put the ring on anyway.

Thankfully, you can hit escape to ignore the ramblings of these diminutive madmen

and the pointless errands they set for you, and get on with the serious business of running away from monsters.

OI, SHORTY!

As a final insult, *TFOTR*, like the hobbits, is guilty of being too short. There is a maximum of ten hours game time here – and that's if you find it extremely tough going, which is unlikely. Competent third-person action/adventurers are more

likely to clock it in about three hours – around the same amount of time it takes to watch the film.

So, what would you rather do? Spend 30 quid on a mediocre game that you'll complete once and then cast into a river? Or spend the same amount of money on a special edition DVD with 30 minutes extra footage that will entertain you time and time again well into the next decade?

If you play a lot of action games and have this old-fashioned theory that they should at least present the player with some kind of challenge then it's an easy decision – buy the DVD.

However, if you are new to this type of game, have cash to throw away and just want to charge through what is after all the only *Lord of the Rings* game on the PC thus far, then give it a whirl. You never know – if you are the forgiving type, you may just squeeze some fun out of this. [X]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Good cut-scenes, voice acting and music
- ✓ Some decent graphics – in places
- ✓ Well drilled NPCs
- ✗ The gameplay is incredibly simplistic
- ✗ Models, animation and camera aren't too hot
- ✗ Ridiculously short

54

A shamelessly poor use of a brilliant licence

"Merry and Pippin sound like Dorset farmers who have spent too much time in the States"

NEOCRON

■ £29.99 | Pub: CDV | Dev: Reakkor
ETA: Out Now | www.neocron.com

REQUIRES PIII 400, 64Mb RAM, 8Mb 3D card and a 56K modem

DESIRES PIII 650, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Blade Runner meets EverQuest meets Chris Anderson. Confusion is rife...



ONLINE ONLY

YOU MAY well wonder how *EverQuest*, with its hordes of goblins and predictable combination of fantasy races to choose from, ever managed to hold the number one spot in the online RPG market with so much competition coming its way. Speaking as someone who has played most, if not all, of the big name titles on the online RPG scene, I think I can answer that question for you. *EverQuest*'s gameplay may well be linear and repetitive and its fantasy characters clichéd and unoriginal, but the gameworld itself is hugely atmospheric, colourful, detailed and most importantly, varied. It really is that simple. *Dark Age Of Camelot* is too small and while *Anarchy Online* is big enough, everywhere you go looks the same, but in *EverQuest* you can travel just a short way and come across parts of the world that are completely different from where

you've just been. This is what gives it such lasting appeal.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Neocron is the latest contender for *EQ*'s throne, and let me just say straight off that it's no epic in terms of size and variation of

landscape, although it tries a lot harder in this respect than recent games in the genre.

Neocron's gameworld is comprised of sectors, at the centre of which is *Neocron* itself, a futuristic city full of mission



There just had to be a mutant in here somewhere. Here he is then...



The red light district. No, it's not where people flash red lights at each other.

terminals, which set you tasks so you can stock up on neocredits (in-game currency) and buy weapons and equipment. The settings for the city and all the zones linking off from it are dark and moody, many a little claustrophobic. The one major exception to this is the Wastelands, which is an outdoor sector that provides welcome relief from the cluttered sectors in the city and the outzones.

Within this environment players are forming clans (guilds) that are aligned to different factions of the game, many of which show natural hostility towards each other, and so the scene is set perfectly for player versus player combat.

You start off by choosing from one of only four character classes: psi monk, spy, private eye and tank (a straightforward melee soldier), but you can begin in a wide variety of locations, depending on which faction you choose to align with at the start of the game. This is a good thing and makes starting a new character an exciting prospect, since you can literally start over and experience your beginning levels from a completely different point of view.

"Neocron has had a smooth launch but was it launched too early? Yes"

INPERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST

Reviewed Issue 80, Score 85%
It's still the best, there's no getting away from it, and with the arrival of *Planes Of Power*, which we'll review next issue, it could be better than ever. If fantasy rather than sci-fi is your thing, here's your game.

ANARCHY ONLINE

Reviewed Issue 114, Score 82%
A great game with plenty of depth in terms of character development, and next to nothing to do when you reach a high level. Spectacularly unimaginative in terms of landscape design, but hugely engrossing nonetheless.

IT'S A MONSTER... OR IS IT?

PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE



Oh no, now I'm really scared. So what kind of enemies are you expecting from a futuristic RPG? Hang on, don't answer that, because what you're actually going to get is... rats, spiders, bees, dogs, mutants, blah, blah, blah. I mean really, is nobody capable of making a game that doesn't use exactly the same opponents that you see in all the other games? The answer would appear to be a resounding 'no'. *Neocron* is no more guilty of this than other games in the genre, but somehow we had hoped for more...

the private eye is an all-rounder (he can do a bit of everything) and the tank just runs around shooting and hitting things in the head, as that's about all he's capable of.

It's a very poor selection of classes I'm sure you'll agree, but you can personalise them to a large extent using the various sub-skills which branch off from

A CLASS APART

The classes all have names that make them sound unique, but basically they are all derivatives of classes we've seen before: the psi monk is basically a futuristic spellcaster, weak in melee but powerful with psionic spells. The spy can also cast reasonably efficiently and also excels in tech areas, whereas



This is your apartment. Get used to it.



Spider gets futuristic spell thingy in the face.



Shops tend to have most of what you need.



A navigation system plots your route with clearly highlighted flashing arrows.

LAUNCH NOW, PATCH LATER

WHY NOT GET IT RIGHT IN THE FIRST PLACE?



Neocron has announced the pending release of a patch for the retail version of the game. The patch basically puts the stuff in that was supposed to be there in the first place. Players will be able to team up, as well as share experience points and loot. Players and NPCs will be colour-coded on inspection so you can tell how powerful they are.

Classes will be more balanced with clearly defined front roles and support roles. Yes that's it, all the stuff that was in the other online RPGs right at the very beginning. To be fair though, *Neocron* had a very smooth launch, all things considered. I think we can forgive them the 'delay' of the bits missing from their game. However, was it launched too early? Repeat after me: 'Yes'. So what's new?

the major skills all characters possess (such as intelligence, dexterity, strength) and this goes a long way to making up for the meagre class selection. *Neocron* does not feature 'levelling up' in the accepted role-playing sense. Instead you gain levels in your different skills the more often you use them which is a much better system. It has actually done away with the levelling obsession prevalent in most games of this type (most

noticeably in *EverQuest*) and encourages people to just get on and enjoy the game without worrying about what level they've reached (it's very similar to *Morrowind* in this respect). Let's hope designers of similar titles take note.

FIGHT NOW, TALK LATER

The only controversial aspect of *Neocron* is perhaps the option for open player versus player combat (PvP) in all areas. You can avoid this by keeping your Life Enhancer implanted throughout the game, but you will level slower and suffer higher skill requirements to use weapons and items should you choose to play this way. It seems very strange that people who opt out of PvP for fear of being killed by other players are being penalised in this way, while rampant player killers suffer no such restrictions.

Admittedly, there is a system whereby your Soul Light becomes visibly negative the more you kill other players,

eventually meaning you'll be killed on sight by guards and vendors won't trade with you. But in practice, player killers are not easily recognisable and you are just as likely to be killed by someone with a positive Soul Light anyway. The whole system is a bit of a shambles at present, though hopefully this will be fixed in the next patch.

That aside, *Neocron* feels fresh, exciting, engrossing and atmospheric. It's a long way from being perfect, but we see great things ahead for this title. **82**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent character development opportunities.
- ✓ Virtually lag-free.
- ✓ Convincing sci-fi atmosphere.
- ✗ Very limited class selection
- ✗ Numerous comedy bugs and unexpected crashes
- ✗ Team-play non-existent as of yet

85

A great start for a great online RPG

"Neocron feels fresh, exciting, engrossing and atmospheric"



JUNGLE WARFARE



M60s



AIRSTRIKES



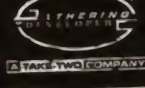
NAM!



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The driver on the right is very angry.



"It may not be totally immersive, but it is just about playable"



OK, admittedly this is a slightly unorthodox route, but it's damn effective.

TOTAL IMMERSION RACING

£34.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: Razorworks | ETA: Out Now | www.totalimmersionracing.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Steve Hill is strapped in and ready for a ride...

DEMAND intelligent racing, they said. The first driving game to feature computer opponents with intelligence like real racing drivers, they said. What do we say? Poppycock. Although, if you inspect the back of the box closely, you'll see that we also say "an outstanding degree of artificial intelligence," a quote lifted from a longer sentence that appeared in a news story a few issues back. They're probably not after any more quotes, but how about "a barely discernible degree of artificial intelligence."

If you've been following the game's progress, you'll recall that

much of the emphasis has been placed on the so-called 'A.I. TUDE' whereby drivers display emotions as indicated by coloured symbols floating above their cars. Piss them off and they'll get angry and carve you up; leave them alone and they won't. Having played the game, the kindest thing we can say is that if we hadn't been told about the feature, we probably wouldn't

have noticed it. Something of a red herring, it seems to be little more than a hook on which to hang the marketing campaign.

SIGNS OF CHANGE

For sure, the symbols change colour when you ram into someone, but whether you do or not, all of the drivers' behaviour remains consistently erratic, if that's not a paradox.

Basically, everyone rams into you all of the time, and the AI seems to be based on Stevie Wonder, reducing the races to a glorified bout of dodgem cars. And the only apparent effect of annoying fellow drivers is to set up largely meaningless rivalries with other drivers and teams.

BUMP 'N' GRIND

For what is in reality a non-contact sport, there's a lot of bumping, with little repercussion due to the fact that the cars pick up no damage. In fact, with judicious use of the rear view you can block opponents for pretty much an entire race, simply allowing them to ram into you.

As for the handling, there's no real purchase and the cars don't seem to grip the road properly, and staying on the track often involves slowing down to almost walking speed. The best way to negotiate a bend is to get on the inside of the traffic and simply bounce off your opponents.



Not great then, and the overall effect isn't helped by the graphics, which carry a strong whiff of PS2. However, if you can get over these eccentricities, there's reasonable longevity offered by the career mode, and a lot of cars and tracks to be unlocked in the many challenges. It may not be totally immersive, but it is just about playable. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Reasonable longevity
- ✓ Cars handle differently
- ✓ It's not another rally game
- ✗ Ropy handling
- ✗ Meaningless rivalries
- ✗ No real sense of speed

64

Total indifference



Racing from inside the car is a far more immediate experience.

INPERSPECTIVE

F1 2002

Reviewed Issue 117, Score 84%

Some of the tracks are the same, but the cars are considerably better.

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

Reviewed Issue 117, Score 95%

If you like a heavy helping of crime with your driving then you won't find better than this.



Headache? Try this alternative to aspirin.



New World Order requires a mammoth machine to run properly. If it fails to take off then you know where to point the finger.

NEW WORLD ORDER

■ £24.99 | Pub: Project 3 Interactive |
Dev: Termite Games | ETA: Out Now |
www.p3int.com

REQUIRES PIII 900, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D Card

DESIRES At least a P4 1.2GHz, 512Mb RAM and a GeForce 3 graphics card

Could Counter-Strike be heading for a fall? Paul Presley checks out the latest pretender to the throne

I'm sure there's a Little Spotted Mallard around here somewhere.



JUST as the playful kitten of hope is apt to wind up with the veterinarian of fate bearing the scalpel of inevitability, so any new online shooter is destined to be judged by the near impossible standards set up by the King Of All Games – *Counter-Strike*. *Team Factor*, *Global Ops* and a 1,001 *Half-Life*, *Quake* and *Unreal* mods have all come, saw and been conquered.

Which makes it all the more worrying that *New World Order's* pre-release publicity seems to have centred solely around how it's the new *Counter-Strike*. Given that moving an entrenched audience to pastures new is difficult at the best of times (just ask Wimbledon FC), when that audience is made up of the hardest of the hardcore gamers out there, it's liable to be a task not unlike moving the English Channel somewhere

south of Malaysia using little more than a thimble.

Thing is, *NWO's* seemingly insurmountable task may not be all that far-fetched. Few would deny that *Counter-Strike's* age of dominance has, much like Manchester United's odorous grip on the footballing leagues, become somewhat shakier of late. The rise of the clans has

or outright annihilation. New twists come in the shape of a story-based single-player mode, a very playable co-op multiplayer mode and an engine that's been developed from scratch.

Basically, what you have is a dynamic visibility analysis set-up, which for laymen in the audience means if you can't see it, it doesn't draw it. The game only

“NWO is going to have to open itself up to the mod community pretty sharpish”

alienated the casual gamer and here in the *ZONE* emporium we're all feeling as though we're just going through the motions.

CS has evolved as far as it can, at least until *Condition Zero* is released. Games such as *Battlefield 1942*, *Medal Of Honor*, *Operation Flashpoint* and *Unreal II* are winning audiences left, right and centre, so why shouldn't the time be right for someone to take on the king?

renders that which is visible, rather than wasting processing power on hidden objects, with every pixel subject to real-time lighting, shadowing, bump-mapping, specular highlighting and so on and so on into a world where words no longer have any meaning to anyone below genius levels of IQ.

All you need to know is that it looks fantastic, but at a price. Your PC is going to have to work harder than an East End sweatshop immigrant if you even want to get *NWO* running in the first place. Speeds of less than 1GHz, RAM below 512Mb and 3D cards anywhere less than GeForce 3 capacity and you might as well be hitting the box

IMPERSPECTIVE

COUNTER-STRIKE

Reviewed Issue 119, Score 86%
Still the best, but frankly even we're getting bored of it by now. We need *Condition Zero* now.

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 91%
Fast-paced, team-based online shooter set in WWII. Currently proving the most fun, but not without its faults.



All together: "Behind You!!!"

Just like in *Counter-Strike* you can either play as terrorists or CTs.

feet away and ignoring a colleague that's just dropped dead at their feet.

PLAN OF ACTION

They also have the ability to shoot out your iris from more a mile away with little more than a paperclip and a rubber band. And single-player is possibly one of the hardest gaming experiences I've ever had.

If *NWO* is to make the kind of impact that beneath it all it actually deserves to, it's going to need three things. First is extensive post-release support and refinement from the developers. Remember, *Counter-Strike* was only really playable from about version 1.3 onwards.

All of the above issues, all the feedback from the gamers, all the usual sources of constructive criticism should be listened to rather than ignored.

Secondly, it's going to have to open itself up to the mod community pretty sharpish. *CS* only flourished thanks to the extensive amateur development community that sprung up around it. New maps, skins, weapons and the like are the stuff of life for online shooters, and without them you might as well be pissing in the wind.

Finally it needs you. Now that may sound more obvious than a plot twist in a Jeffrey Archer novel, but it bears mentioning partly to provide

you with a puffed up sense of your own importance, but mainly because all too often games such as this are roundly dismissed by the hardcore crowd before they've had a chance to fully bloom. When *NWO* plays well, it plays very well indeed. As with any new-born baby, we're just going to have to bear with it while it goes through a difficult infancy stage. **[X]**

Bad time to reload dude, a very, very bad time actually.

with a stick for all the fun you'll get from it. You'll have to be ADSL'ed up too, as the netcode is such that a mere 56Kbps simply won't be fast enough.

RUINED IN A DAY

What strikes you most is the impression that *NWO*'s developers set out while *CS* was in its earlier, less playable condition and have since neglected to pay attention both to how *CS* has managed to continually evolve with each update and to what a plethora of other shooters have since brought to the table.

Basic gameplay issues abound, such as dead players' text being readable by players still running around, inability to lean around corners, spectator modes which are almost laughably pointless, hostage pathfinding being practically non-

existent, problems jumping if you're on anything other than flat ground, invisible barriers where level maps aren't quite constructed properly, horrendous lag and failing netcode.

The AI also needs some extensive tweaking. Aside from the aforementioned hostages who have all the intelligence of a Premiership footballer (and significantly less ability to run straight), the enemies exhibit signs of extreme schizophrenia, ranging from summoning reinforcements, setting ambushes, running away to try and flank you from behind and running in small circles on the spot when you're less than five

WEIGHTY ISSUES

Light equals right in the *New World Order*.

NO MORE MAGIC POCKETS

One of the more subtle differences between *NWO* and *Counter-Strike* is the way you acquire guns. *CS* makes you pay for them, here you have to select based on a weight and ranking system.

Where it most makes a difference is during the game. Unlike *CS* in which you can pick up any gun lying around and add it to your arsenal, if you see a desirable weapon on the floor, but it takes you over your weight limit, you'll have to drop something else to compensate. With ammo also adding to the weight on your back, the whole game has a slightly more tactical slant than its main rival.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Bloody good co-op modes
- ✓ Detailed graphics
- ✓ Fresh twists on *CS* gameplay
- ✗ Needs a mammothly high-spec machine to run
- ✗ Single-player is waaaaay too hard
- ✗ Gameplay issues need sorting

69

Good, but needs a lot of work to be better

HAEGEMONIA

£29.99 | Pub: Wanadoo | Dev: Digital Reality | ETA: November 22 |
www.haegemonia.com

REQUIRES PIII 600, 192Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM and a 64Mb 3D card

Richie Shoemaker blasts into space in this epic space-based RTS

DESPITE A name that suggests something you might apply to the inside of an oven to dislodge stalagmites of burnt cheese, or perhaps a cream intended to liberate one's testicles from the rigours of chafing, *Haegemonia* is a space strategy game and a cracking one at that. Going on the past record of its Hungarian developer, you'd expect as much, seeing as it was Digital Reality who conceived and created the first two episodes in the critically acclaimed *Imperium Galactica* series. With that responsibility now in the hands of another team, Digital Reality has continued to follow the empire-building themes it pioneered, offering once again a strong story-driven campaign and epic real-time battles set across and beyond the solar system.

On the face of it, *Haegemonia* looks to be the latest title wishing

"The graphics and ease of use make for a very entertaining game"

to take the space strategy throne from *Homeworld*. All the conventions laid out in RTS gaming are followed, with resources to plunder (mining asteroids), ships to build and enemy fleets to vanquish. However, there's a lot more to do than just mine and manufacture, with no less than 200 technologies to research, dozens of planets to colonise and a rich story to play through, with the Mars colonies on the brink of war with mother Earth and alien races waiting in the wings.

INPERSPECTIVE

HOMEWORLD

Reviewed: Issue 117, Score 90%

The first real attempt to take the RTS game into 3D space and although it took a bit of getting used to, once mastered, the interface and design allowed for some truly awesome battles. Now available for a mere fiver.

CONQUEST: FRONTIER WARS

Reviewed: Issue 109, Score 82%

In gameplay terms, this is probably the closest relative to *Haegemonia*, although it's in 2D and looks far inferior. Being shallow types, we'd go for the new boy, although having seen *Conquest* wallowing in a few bargain buckets, it's definitely worth liberating if you can find it.



Looks like rain yet again.



Military bases are the ultimate weapon and like the Death Star, they move rather slowly.



Explosions. Now this is something we like.

abilities of your ships, which can traverse the great beyond in minutes, or less if you decide to speed up the game clock.

INNER BEAUTY

The beauty of the game isn't just skin deep, but for the record, the graphics are far more impressive than many other space-related games, especially when it comes to explosions. What will be a welcome relief to the many of you who might otherwise give such a game a wide berth is that it gradually but steadily teaches you the ropes without ever over-complicating matters, especially in the very difficult later stages. The problem with empire

building games generally (and this was certainly true of *Imperium Galactica II*) is that unless you approach them with the right mentality, you'll soon find yourself being overwhelmed by the whole affair. This also happens with 3D strategy games, especially ones set in space. It's all too easy to become confused by their often hideously complicated and disorientating interfaces. However, *Haegemonia* manages to avoid both of these problems.

Unfortunately, despite their beauty, battles are rather small scale. The designers have clearly limited the number of ships you can build, and to make matters

slightly worse, there's a fairly limited amount of battle tactics which you can employ; just click on the enemy, watch and hope for the best.

Despite this, the depth of research options, the graphics and ease of use make for a very entertaining game, and while there could have been more scope for battle strategies, there's more than enough focus on other key areas like story and characters to make this an essential purchase. So while the settings of *Homeworld* and *Haegemonia* are similar, the feel and focus of these two behemoths are light years apart, meaning space-based RTS fans will be far from disappointed. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ It's very pretty
- ✓ Easy to get to grips with
- ✓ A surprising amount of depth later on
- ✓ Plenty of research options
- ✗ Battle orders are limited
- ✗ Small-scale battles

82

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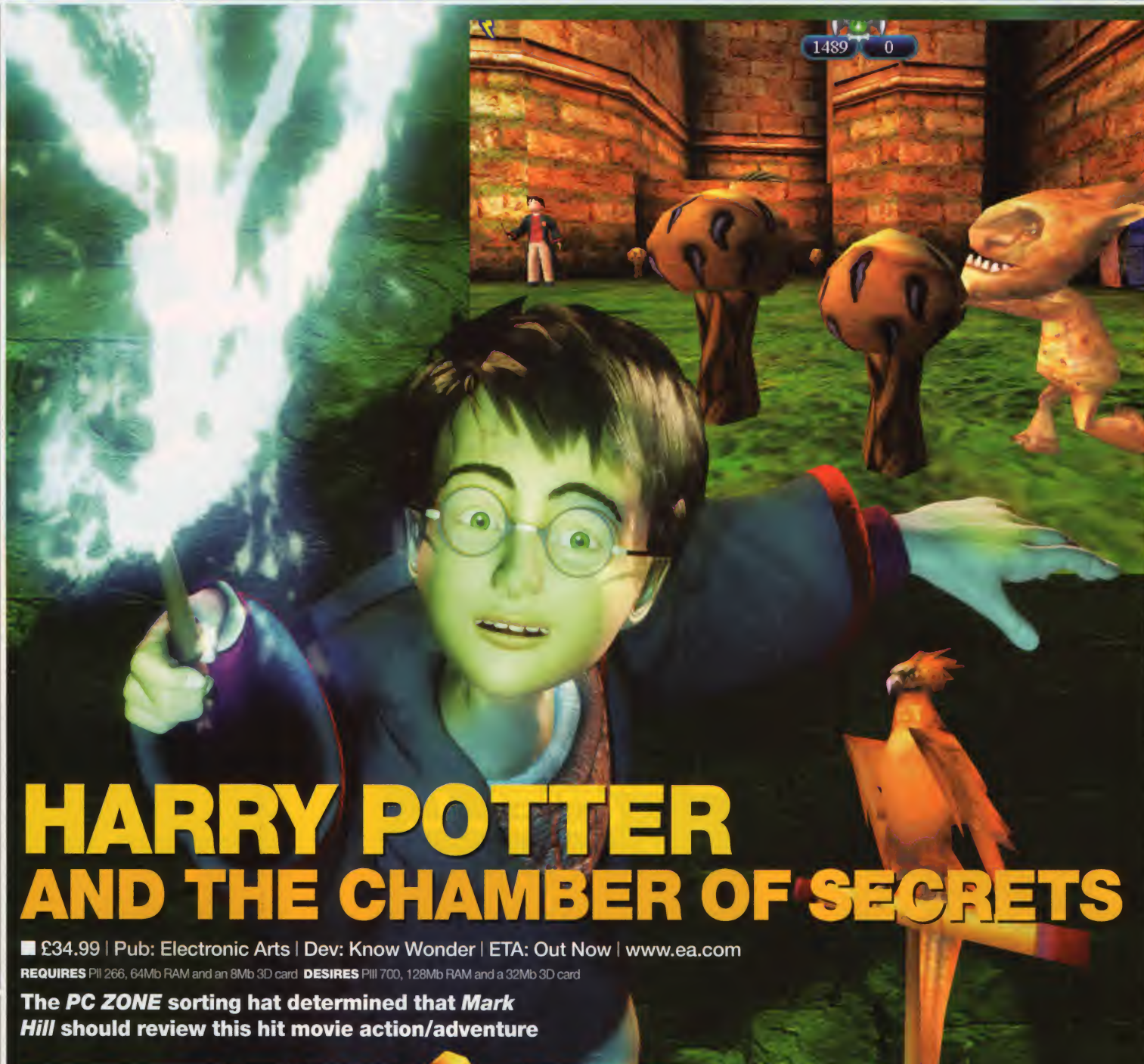
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HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

■ £34.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Know Wonder | ETA: Out Now | www.ea.com

REQUIRES PII 266, 64Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 700, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

The **PC ZONE** sorting hat determined that **Mark Hill** should review this hit movie action/adventure

IN PERSPECTIVE

HARRY POTTER AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Reviewed Issue 112, Score 80%

This first game in the series was less repetitive and slightly more challenging, which turns out to matter more than length and pretty cut-scenes.

TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES

Reviewed Issue 98, Score 72%

A full-on platform game. It already looks like it was found in an ancient tomb though.



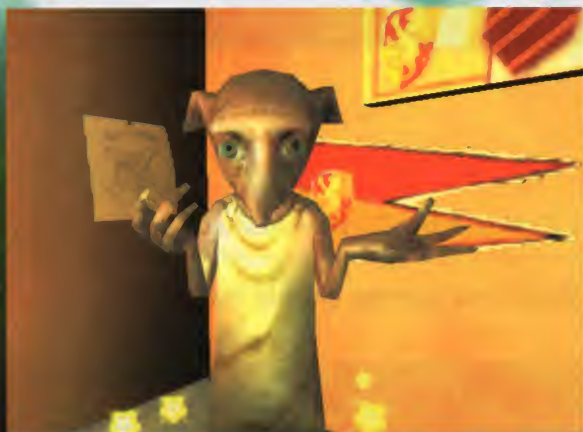
The cut-scenes and loading times soon get on your nerves.

THE PROBLEM with popularity is that everyone ends up hating you. Or, if you prefer your aphorisms slightly shorter: success breeds contempt. Just look at Man Utd. And so it is with Harry Potter. Had J K Rowling's books been confined to the kiddie's section of the library and the praise for them kept in obscure journals of children's literature no one's heckles would be raised by the sight of the bespectacled, scar-faced chimp. But when the arrival of a new novel makes headline news, every trend-following moron on public transport has their faces contorted into frowns of concentration over one of the colourful books and you can't go through the check-

out till of your local supermarket without knocking over a stall of bloody chocolate broomsticks, the only natural reaction is to start snarling like a rabid dog. Especially when the full force of the next film's marketing campaign rubs your nose into the whole thing and, even worse, your favourite magazine runs a two-page review of the tie-in game.

FLIPPENDO

There are two reasons why the *Harry Potter* games matter. One is that the books are actually damn good – some of the best escapist fiction available in fact – and the games do a better job of recreating Hogwarts than the films do. The other reason is



Running away from a girl, huh? You big jessie.



Most of the voice acting does a passable impression of the actors in the film. Except for the Kenneth Branagh one.

HOUSING BENEFITS

LET THE GAMES BEGIN...

House points play a much bigger role in this version, reflecting their importance in the books. To get them you need to pass the revamped (and, like everything else, far easier) spell-learning subgames, complete challenges in the shortest time possible and win Quidditch matches. Every so often the digitised Dumbledore (will they use this computer-generated muppet to replace the great Richard Harris in the next film I wonder?) will announce which house is in the lead. Unless you're a complete spanner it will be yours. The reward is a timed excursion to a bean-filled level. A sort of 3D *Pac-Man* without the ghosts.



Learning how to cast spells is incredibly easy.



Strangely, the PlayStation 2 version is aimed at an older audience, which makes a change.

that decent PC games for kids are inexplicably rare. Granted, not many seven year-olds will get a Pentium 4 instead of a GameCube for Christmas, but does that mean PC-owning parents should have to settle for *Virtual Barbie* when they try to introduce their children to computers?

Last year's *The Philosopher's Stone* was a pleasant surprise

larger and more luscious. The characters on the other hand are still blocky and lacking in detail, most noticeable when the camera moves up close during conversations.

Other improvements and additions are the greater freedom to explore, the introduction of schoolyard traders (get a new broomstick, wizard cards or spell

hands, everything is accomplished with a wave of the wand and a magic word. Most of the time it's the same word and, when you're surrounded by creatures that need stunning repeatedly, the over-enthusiastic voice starts to echo deep in your brain rather painfully.

Despite the subgames, story breaks and occasional free-

"The Chamber Of Secrets can almost be played one-handed. With your eyes shut"

for this reason. It was simple, short and aimed squarely at the pubescent population, while managing at the same time to be a well-crafted and entertaining game too. This year's effort is pretty much identical and follows the traditional corporate sequel formula of bigger is better. In theory, this is a good thing, since one of the flaws of last year's title was its shortness. The problem, as always, is that bigger just isn't enough.

FLIPPENDO

It's obvious the developers have had more time to spend on the game with the technology and gameplay core already in place. So, instead of last year's pathetic drawn sketch opening, we're treated to a proper intro movie following the events from the book and narrated by the brilliant Stephen Fry (also responsible for the audio books). It's only his appropriately enchanting voice that makes the saturation of such cut-scenes throughout the game bearable.

The graphics, inevitably, are better, and Hogwarts seems

ingredients in exchange for the Bertie Botts Every Flavoured Beans you collect Pac-Man-like through every level) and a new duelling sub-game to add to the Quidditch league.

This wizard version of football has also been changed, although hardly improved. While before you had the freedom to fly wherever you wanted in search of the golden snitch, this time you follow it automatically. The thinking, which has driven much of the redesign, is that this is much easier, and so more tot-friendly. So, while last year's title had a certain simplistic platform-game allure for adults, *The Chamber Of Secrets* can almost be played one-handed. With your eyes shut. Balancing a watermelon on your head.

FLIPPENDO

Yes. That's the third heading with the same word. Annoying, isn't it? Just wait until you've heard the damn word 789 times. You see, the core of the game has Harry running around levels jumping, moving boxes, opening chests and the like but, instead of doing anything as working-class as using his

roaming, the repetition becomes all the more noticeable thanks to the developer's determination to make this a longer experience. But when Prince sang that there's *Joy In Repetition*, he wasn't referring to videogames.

Of course, if you've ever been forced to sit through the *Teletubbies*, you'll know variety isn't exactly high on a toddler's priority list. But just how low an age group is EA aiming for?

For all the criticisms, *Harry Potter* is still a good game, but one only the youngest players will fully appreciate. [C]

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Excellent environments
- ✓ More subgames
- ✓ Some freedom
- ✗ Far too repetitive
- ✗ Dumbed down gameplay
- ✗ Too many cut-scenes

74

Improvements are let down by repetition and lack of difficulty



PLATOON

■ £29.99 | Pub: Monte Cristo | Dev: Digital Reality | ETA: November 22 | www.montecristogames.com

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and an 8Mb 3D card **DESIRES** A few more months in development, but failing that a PIII 600 with 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

War may be hell, but **Paul Presley** doesn't think war games should be

APPARENTLY the most commonly heard phrase during the Vietnam War was, "Grab your packs boys, we're moving out." Which is odd because I'd always thought it would have been more along the lines of, "God NO!!! SWEET MOTHER OF CHRIST I DON'T WANT TO F***** DIE!!!" Shows what I know.

The former must be true though, as Monte Cristo has gone to great pains to tell anyone that will listen just how realistic a portrayal of the war *Platoon* is. To which I can only reply, "cough*balls*cough".

STONE COLD

First up, don't be expecting any real connection to Oliver Stone's brutally classic film of the same name. Yes it has the official licence and recreates the film poster on the box and



The camera is horribly erratic.



Graphics are poor at best.

soldiers was able to carry on walking and fighting even after stepping on two landmines. It's about as realistic as *The A-Team*.

And so on and so on. There's loads more but I simply don't have the space. What's really annoying about it all is that these are issues that any amount of time spent game balancing and testing should

have thrown up and which, had they been addressed, may actually have made *Platoon* a fairly decent game to play. As it is, it all feels as though even the developers didn't give a flying rat's arse about the game. Which just leaves us thinking why the hell should we? **PCZ**

IMPERSPECTIVE

COMMANDOS 2

Reviewed Issue 108, Score 91%
A squad-based RTS-style war game, but one that's fun to play, if a bit repetitive. OK, they're hardly pushing the realistic angle, but then you are sat in front of your computer in your underwear and not actually killing people for real you know.

PLATOON (THE MOVIE), FULL METAL JACKET, APOCALYPSE NOW, ETC
Reviewed Issue n/a, Score n/a
The only way to, er, enjoy the Vietnam War one suspects. Until a decent *Op Flashpoint* mod comes along I suppose.

in the intro sequence, but that and the occasional reference to a couple of the film's characters during a mission is as far as it goes.

Platoon the film brought home the full unvarnished horror of what that insanely futile war was all about. The brutality, the insanity, the loss of innocence, the narcotic abuse, the immoral behaviour towards the Vietnamese people, etc. *Platoon* the game is as bog-standard a squad-based RTS as it could possibly be, dressed in Vietnam clothing.

VETTING PROCEDURE

If the concept is bog-standard, the implementation is where *Platoon* really falls down. An utterly worthless camera that is both achingly unfriendly to control, zooming and tilting on its own accord like a deranged Don Quixote, as well as useless for seeing anything further than about three feet in front of you.

A lack of any real tactical commands means you can only issue formation controls to pre-set groups of soldiers and have no flexibility at all when combining units. The movement speed of your troops means anyone with a slightly bigger gun than the others will invariably walk at about an eighth of the speed of anyone else. And as for realism, well, let's just say that one of my

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ One of the only Vietnam games out there
- ✓ Good use of terrain
- ✗ Not much tactical control
- ✗ Camera is ridiculously useless
- ✗ Claims of realism ridiculous
- ✗ Wastes a perfectly good film licence

45

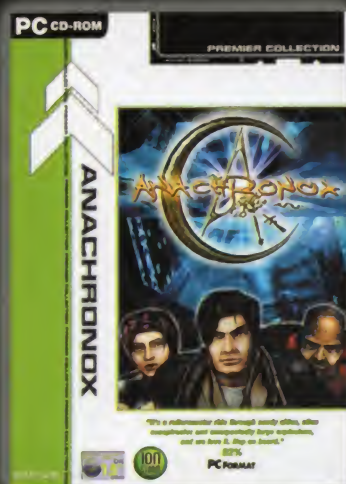
The first casualty of war is the gameplay

"Don't expect any real connection to Oliver Stone's brutally classic film of the same name"





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"In case we need to spell it out:
you really ought to try Anachronox."

PCGAMER



"Eden may truly represent
a gamer's paradise."

PCGAMER



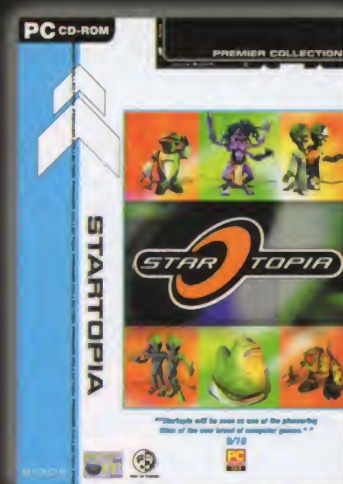
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Like pushing Jo Brand in a shopping trolley, ice racing is one big powerslide.

Lots of mud and trees. What did you expect from a rally game?

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microsoft | Dev: Digital Illusions | ETA: November 22

www.microsoft.com/uk/games/rallisport

REQUIRES PIII 733, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card DESIRES P4 1.5GHz and 256Mb RAM

Steve Hill is floundering about in the dirt, and reviewing a rally game

IT'S BEEN a while since a rally game flopped on to our doormat, a situation now rectified by the release of this so-called 'Xbox exclusive.' A launch title for Microsoft's behemoth console, it was largely lost in the post-*Halo* hype, as well as being somewhat overshadowed by the splendid *Project Gotham Racing*. Nevertheless, *RallySport Challenge* is a superb Xbox game, and one that has been ported to the PC with the minimum of fuss and four shiny new cars.

Developed by Swedish pinball turned racing game veterans Digital Illusions and following their excellent *Rally Masters* of a few years back, this is a highly polished game. Naturally, being a rally game, it doesn't completely break the mould, and you can expect to drive a selection of noisy cars around a series of clearly dangerous tracks.

However, within the genre they have managed to add a great deal of variety, and are now offering four different types of action.

INPERSPECTIVE

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2

Reviewed Issue: 110, Score 86%
Still a cracking game, and available for a fiver. Five quid!

GRAND PRIX 4

Reviewed Issue: 119, Score 86%
Prefer F1 racing to rally driving? Then this should be your game.

FOUR TO THE FLOOR

The traditional rally sections are of course included, requiring you to shave crucial fractions of a second off your time on a solitary run. It's the usual seat-of-the-pants stuff, although if we have one quibble it's that the co-driver tends to get a little ahead of himself. For instance,

he'll be warning you of a "medium left, don't cut, trees inside", while you're still trying to get your head (and car) around an "easy right into hard left, careful, rocks". On-screen help is also available, and providing you can retune your brain to accommodate the shift in time, it's manageable.



You'll need a high-spec PC to get your cars looking their best.



"It's not going to change your life, but it may well keep you indoors for a while"

For a change of pace, the hill climb mode offers just that, with numerous opportunities for you to attempt to get your Toyota Corolla up steep-as-you-like tracks before the inevitable plummet down nearby ravines.

There is also a four-car racing option on tracks composed of intermittent stretches of gravel and tar, and, finally, in a nod to the game's Scandinavian roots, the ice racing section, essentially one great big powerslide.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

All top stuff, it offers a mainly satisfying drive. The mechanics of the career mode have been designed particularly well, with extra cars and tracks only becoming available after a concerted effort.

As well as points for finishing position, bonuses are also available for not damaging your car, encouraging you to straddle a fine line between safety and speed. And while it needs an

absolute mother of a PC to get the best out of it, the graphics are undeniably impressive, with swaying trees, animated crowds, and even animals fleeing your speeding car.

In the short term, *RallySport Challenge* is addictive, and while it's not going to change your life, it might well keep you indoors for a while. With *Colin McRae 3* still some way off, this is one of your best bets in the meantime. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Variety of tracks
- ✓ Engrossing career mode
- ✓ Half decent tunes
- ✗ Over eager co-driver
- ✗ High spec required

78

Mud, sweat and gears

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2003



■ £34.99 | Pub: EA Sports | Dev: Headgate Studios | ETA: November 22 |

www.ea.com/easports/platforms/games/tigerwoods2003

REQUIRES PIII 600, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D Card **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

More grass. More bogeys. More Keith Pullin. More golf



BALL FLIGHT:
Straight
CLUB SPEED: 91%
IMPACT: Pure
TEMPO: Very Slow
CLUB PATH: Straight
Press F1 for Details

A downhill tee shot with a shed load of bunkers and ocean to avoid. Nice.



Putting's easy to master, so yet again it's a bit of a let down.

LAST month saw the arrival of *Links 2003*, the best golf game ever released on the PC. This month sees the arrival of *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003*, a serious contender for the best golf game ever released on the PC. So, how does the all new *Tiger Woods* fare?

INPERSPECTIVE

PGA CHAMPIONSHIP GOLF 2000

Reviewed Issue 92, Score 84%
PGA 2000 is still a seamless combination of arcade enjoyment and simulation rolled into one superb package. The online community is also still thriving, so there's no shortage of buddies to play with.

LINKS 2003

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 82%
The most complete golf sim available for the PC. Great online options, a good architect, realistic physics, good tournament options and multiple control methods. Whatever your level, *Links 2003* is your game.

Visually and acoustically *TW2003* blows *Links 2003* away; the sea crashes against the rocks and sends spray into the air, lakes ripple and reflect the swaying trees around them, morning fog drifts across the course and rain lashes down – it's simply stunning. *TW2003* manages to unlock that unique feeling of cold, wet, utter despair that is normally reserved for a real life course on a morning so raw you can't even grip the club.

THE FOLLOW-THROUGH

No surprises so far then. We could have told you ten years ago that *TW2003* would look great. EA games always look great. What we could not have told you and what we could never have known is that this particular episode is also immensely playable.

TW2003 is instantly accessible. Beginners are helped along by a selection of AI aids that seem to mysteriously

attraction of the TrueSwing mouse interface.

However, in truth, there is a distinct arcade feel to *TW2003* due to the amount of help offered. While this is great for those looking for a fun-filled blast with their mates and a few beers, it's not so perfect if you're after that 'simulation' feel. Even the career mode, with its eclectic mixture of tournaments and curious selection of longest drive and closest to the pin putting

want from a golf game. If, like we said, you're happy with an easy to play game experience and a couple of mates by your side then *Tiger Woods* is the one for you. (Although maybe you should buy a PS2 instead, you pussy.)

If, on the other hand, you want a more serious golf game, with more stats and more shot options, stick to *Links 2003*. **EW**

"When it comes to sheer playability *Tiger Woods 2003* cannot be faulted"

The television camera angles and commentary are also a class apart. And when you throw in 12 real courses including St Andrews, Sahalee and Royal Birkdale, as well as realistic looking models of Mr Woods and other exceptional athletes like Colin Montgomery, you can't help but feel satisfied.

pull the ball towards the hole no matter how much you fluff your shot. As you gradually improve and move up the ranks (there are five ranking levels ranging from amateur to master), these aids disappear until finally you can draw, fade, flop, chip and punch under your own steam, all of course with the added

competitions, has a sort of cute *Pilotwings* feel to it, rather than the raw feeling of proper golf.

PRO/AM

When it comes to sheer playability though, *TW2003* cannot be faulted. As for whether it's better than *Links 2003*? It completely depends on what you

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Great presentation
- ✓ Easy to get into
- ✓ Well devised career mode
- ✓ Different weather effects
- ✗ More arcade than simulation
- ✗ You never feel like you're totally in control

81

Not quite top of the leaderboard

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No question about it, that's a basket.

NBA LIVE 2003

■ £29.99 | Pub: Electronic Arts | Dev: Electronic Arts Canada |
ETA: November 29 | www.easports.com

REQUIRES PII 300, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

DESIRES PIII 700, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

Steve Hill in EA Sports game review non-shocker

WE'VE traditionally been uncommonly generous to EA's annual basketball outing, regularly saddling it with all manner of plaudits. Our enthusiasm has been mainly fuelled by the realisation that it offers a comprehensive representation of a game that we are largely unfamiliar with, replete with all the razzamatazz associated with high-profile American sports. We can safely say that it's a slam-dunking,

game somewhere in the region of playable. All of those things are true of *NBA Live 2003*, but none of them are enough to sustain anything more than a few hours of interest.

PROBLEMS

If the true test of a sports game is its two-player mode, then *NBA Live* fails. No matter how realistic the stadia are, how accurate the players' faces look, how seamless – and occasionally

tedious cycle of running up to a basket, sticking the ball in it, then watching your opponent do the same until you're told to stop. You might as well just flip a coin.

The crux of the problem is that it's nigh on impossible to defend, with your armoury restricted to little more than a half-hearted lunge or the occasional leap. For the man with the ball, a swift burst of turbo is usually enough to secure

"Seeking out a budget version of a previous incarnation would be a shrewder move"

hoop-busting extravaganza. But do any of us ever play it? Do we bollocks. No sooner is the game reviewed than the disc is tossed aside like so much used pornography.

This year is different though. This year we're not going to get suckered into fawning over it just because it looks good, has plenty of options and delivers a

amusing – the commentary is, no amount of gloss can justify a game that basically involves a

yourself a reasonable vantage point from which to shoot, an activity that requires little or no



You can cut the atmosphere with a spoon.



Did it go in? We can't remember.

skill other than the ability to press a button.

IT DOESN'T MAKE IT OK

But hey, you bleat, that's what the sport of basketball is like, a quickfire high-scoring fast-moving game. Correct, but that still doesn't justify spending £30 to recreate it on a monitor. Anyway, it's clearly more suited to the big screen, and the game shows its console roots in a sloppy fashion, with on-screen instructions urging you to do something or other with the "second analogue stick."



Should be a few burgers sold.

Ultimately, the game isn't too bad in short bursts, and nothing more. And even if you do want to own a basketball game, seeking out a budget version of a previous incarnation would be a shrewder move, as the data updates will only be of concern to aficionados of the sport. *NBA Live 2003* may well be the best basketball game on the PC, but that's the equivalent of being the best-looking girl in Wales. **PC2**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Comprehensive
- ✓ Realistic
- ✗ Inane gameplay
- ✗ Some shit music

64

Basket case

INPERSPECTIVE

NBA LIVE 2000

Reviewed Issue 85, Score 83%
Same meat, different year.

FIFA FOOTBALL 2003

Reviewed Issue 122, Score 80%
Same year, better sport.

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DRIFT

■ £19.99 | Pub: Brightstar
Dev: Redward Studios | ETA: January 10

REQUIRES P166, 32Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card

DESIRES PII 400, 64Mb RAM, 16Mb 3D card and a joystick

**It's a space combat game, and it's
Richie Shoemaker in the cockpit**



Drift looks and plays like a three-year-old game.

CALLING A space combat game *Drift* would be a bit like calling a first-person shooter *Toddle And Spurt*, in that it doesn't so much capture what the game is, as what you do for most of it – in this case saunter through a series of pedestrian missions saving the galaxy from pirates and aliens from the seat of a series of spaceships.

For anyone who's played *Wing Commander*, *X-Wing* or *Freelancer* the formula will be familiar – a mix of escort, attack and reconnaissance missions in between which you get to spend wages on upgrades and repairs, sometimes even hire a wingman or two to help you out.

While graphically *Drift* is rooted in 1998, it will run on pretty much any PC and the

developers have done a good job keeping things clean and uncluttered, even throwing in the odd special effect to keep 3D card owners happy.

Aside from that, there is little to recommend it, especially as games like *Tachyon: The Fringe*, *Starlancer* and *FreeSpace 1* and 2 are available on the cheap and are far superior in almost every way. If you want a new space combat game and can't wait until the ridiculously delayed *Freelancer*, may we suggest you seek out *Star Wraith 3* and just forget *Drift* completely.

**PCZONE
VERDICT 57**

The best game ever
that rhymes with lift

**“Saunter through a series
of pedestrian missions
saving the galaxy”**



One thing's for sure, it's no *Freelancer*.



Ooooooh! Someone got out the wrong side of the bed this morning.

POST MORTEM

■ £39.99 | Pub: Microids | Dev: Microids | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500, 128Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

**James Lyon performs an autopsy on the latest adventure
game. Skull-saw please, nurse**

EVERYTHING I know about the Knights Templar came from computer games, the group continually cropping up, particularly in the adventure game genre. Which, depending on how you look at it, makes it either an endless source of fascination for players over the years, or a derivative plot device that's getting pretty stale.

Something similar could be said about *Post Mortem*'s format – Microids may be struggling but it seems too late to stop its obsession with third-rate pre-rendered adventures.

In this case, we've got an American PI investigating a murder in 1920s Paris before – wooh! – things spiral out of control. Matters aren't helped by him being blander than Iain Duncan Smith eating a water biscuit or by the emotionless voice acting, dull backgrounds and illogical structure.

Its most damning feature has to be its conversation system, making the player miss irretrievable plot information depending on arbitrary choices, and on occasion leading to bouts of precognition on behalf of your character.

A private investigator game has to rely on a set of conventions for its foundations. If you can't get those right, there's no point building a fantasy plot or a handful of puzzles over the top – you're just going to get a mess. *Post Mortem* isn't original in any way, shape or form – you're best seeking out the *Tex Murphy* series or *Discworld Noir* if you want decent gumshoe action.

**PCZONE
VERDICT 45**
Dead on arrival



“Hey buddy, I'm over here. Over here.”

**“You're best seeking out the
Tex Murphy series or *Discworld
Noir* if you want some decent
gumshoe action”**



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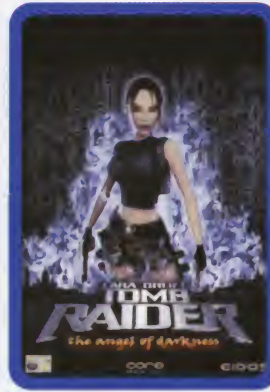
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KNIGHT RIDER: THE GAME

■ £19.99 | Pub: Davilex | Dev: Davilex | ETA: November 22

REQUIRES PII 450, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 733, 256Mb RAM and a 32Mb 3D card

A shadowy flight into the dangerous world of a man who does not exist. Here's Steve Hill



Nice action.



Watch out for trailer trash.



Follow that chopper.

THAT'S 'The Game' as opposed to the TV series, just in case you hadn't managed to make the distinction while browsing round your local games emporium. *Knight Rider* is one of those programmes that nostalgia looks upon kindly. *Knight Rider* couldn't have been more '80s had David Hasselhoff sported a Frankie Says War T-shirt and had a shuttlecock wedged down his tanga briefs.

Big Dave wasn't brought onto this project, possibly because Davilex couldn't afford his hairdresser, or possibly because he's currently recovering from a six-month hangover. Nevertheless, they've managed to do a very

average job without him, and this has all the hallmarks of cheapness you'd associate with the team that brought you *M25 Racer*.

A young loner on a crusade to champion the cause of the innocent, the helpless, the powerless, in a world of criminals who operate above the law, Michael Knight, aided by his trusty KITT car, has to negotiate a number of largely unremarkable missions that mainly take place on a strip of road somewhere in the America mid-west.



Driving KITT isn't the life-changing experience that you may once have imagined, and the handling is largely sluggish. It's too fiddly to be excused as being just for kids, and while there is some short-term kitsch appeal, the only really good thing about *Knight Rider* is the intro music.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

42

It's not really worth the ride

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2003

■ £29.99 | Pub: Microids | Dev: gmax | ETA: November 22

REQUIRES PII 350, 64Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card DESIRES PIII 500 and 128Mb RAM

It's winter, so it must be time to play tennis. Martin Korda is thoroughly confused

IT'S ALWAYS struck me as strange why a tennis game would make an appearance at this time of year. It's akin to releasing *Santa's Christmas Dash* in the middle of an August heatwave, eg somewhere between 1pm on August 12 and 10.30am on August 13. While the unwashed masses slowly expand into their sofas, gorged on cake and Baileys and scraps from the fallout of the Christmas-lunch-table, the furthest thing from their minds is digging out grandad's old wooden racquet. However, a winter launch is exactly what the latest incarnation of the *Tennis Masters Series*, err series, has got, and

despite the poor timing, it's a pretty damn fine game.

So how does it compare to last year's effort? Well, for starters, this time you get to create your own tennis star, allocating stats to serve, forehand, speed etc. 15-0. Then there's the AI, which, although still erratic at times, is fiendishly good and seems to learn from its mistakes and changes its strategy in an attempt to beat you. 30-0. The graphics though are much the same. 30-15. You can play via a network connection. 40-15. But due to the licence restrictions there are still no grass courts, making the selection of playing surfaces quite limited. 40-30. And the



A strategically placed banana can do wonders.



Serving takes some getting used to.

players still run like they've fouled their tennis whites. Deuce. However, the career mode is excellent, charging you with working your way up the ranking ladder in a series of tournaments, which is both

compelling and challenging. Advantage 2003.

However, this version's true ace lies in its gameplay. Sped up and simplified, it no longer plays like a tennis sim, but much more like *Virtua Tennis*, and it comes pretty close to emulating the sheer child-like thrill of batting a ball backwards and forwards over a net as

quickly and skilfully as your pudgy little fingers will allow. And that, as with every match-point ace, seals the win for this year's contender.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

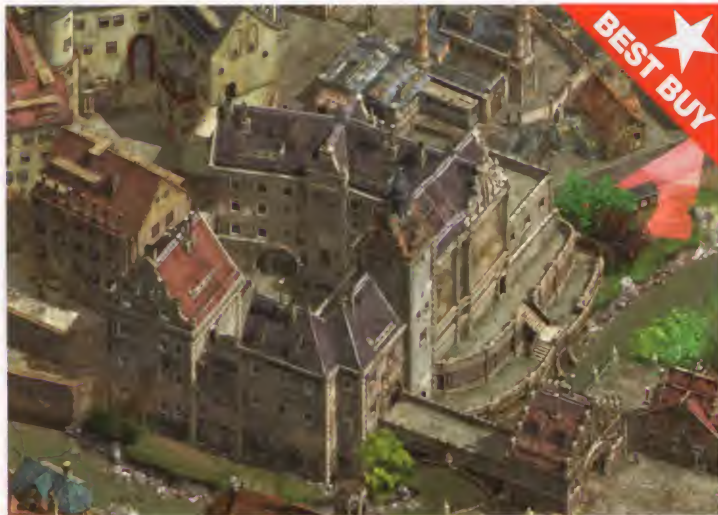
78

The No 1 contender for *Virtua Tennis*' crown

"Sped up and simplified, it no longer plays like a tennis sim, but more like *Virtua Tennis*"

REPLAY

The place to go when you've got no dough



It might look small but the level of detail is staggering.

COMMANDOS 2

■ £12.99 | Pub: Eidos | ETA: Out Now

NOT AS MUCH a strategy game as a wonderful WWII adventure full of brainteasers, *Commandos 2* presents a miniature world as rich in detail as any ship-in-a-bottle. The scale might be tiny, but the levels feel huge, with Colditz Castle, the Eiffel Tower and other locations brought to life with flair and imagination. If, like me, you gave up on the first *Commandos* about two minutes into the very first mission because of the insanely high difficulty level, don't be put off from trying the sequel. It's much more approachable and easy to get to grips with. Once you get used to the mechanics of the game you won't even notice how artificial they are (enemy soldiers' line of sight shown with bright green arcs, sound ripples indicating hearing range and so on) and you'll just get caught up in the classic comic book feel of it, admiring

the scenery and the myriad touches of originality in the process. It won't please everyone, of course. Some will find the painstaking process of distracting/knocking-out/tying-up guards too repetitive and the impatient will still think it too difficult. But it's their loss.

Whether you're manoeuvring your sniper to a high-rise position inside a giant Buddha to take out a general, or simply figuring out how the hell to orchestrate a seemingly impossible rescue, *Commandos 2* is addictive, enjoyable and constantly surprising. It may not have flashy 3D graphics or even a proper storyline, but that doesn't stop it from being one of the best games of the last couple of years.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

90



Told you so...



It should have been free to start with, now it costs a fiver.

GUNMAN CHRONICLES

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

IT MUST HAVE been a pretty good day for a few humble modders scattered across the globe when Sierra called them up to tell them their free *Half-Life* total conversion was going to be put in the shops with Valve's seal of approval. A reward for hard work and talent or a cheap way of getting a new *Half-Life* product on the shelves? Both probably. And while *Gunman* hasn't stood the test of time particularly well, it's still a solid shooter with enough *Half-Life* moments to make up for a daft cowboys-in-space versus dinosaurs storyline. There are also some Xenites and, erm, evil cowboys and such to

shoot, plus a few first-person *Tomb Raider*-style platform hopping touches, but the real innovation is in the weapon department, with each gun displaying a number of settings and adding a slight tactical angle to the relentless combat.

There's also evidence of localised damage and some big set pieces to make the admission price worthwhile, but at a time when we're really looking for something a bit more sophisticated than the usual FPS fare, it does feel overly simplistic and derivative.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

77



Michael Jackson faces his critics.



Because I'm bad, I'm bad. Come on!

SOUL REAVER 2

■ £12.99 | Pub: Eidos | ETA: Out Now

USUALLY WHEN the words "soul" and "sucking" appear together in a review it means we've been playing another bizarre French adventure game, but in this case it's a central element of one of the best action-adventure games of 2002. Building strongly on the foundations laid down by its predecessor, *SR2* again puts you in the undead hooves of Raziel, angst-ridden ex-vampire on a quest for bloody vengeance. But just when you think it's going to be a simple tale of bloodlust and soul-stealing, everything's turned on its head. Friend becomes foe, sworn enemy becomes unlikely ally, and god-like puppet-master becomes giant squid. It's compelling stuff, provided you can forgive the heavy-handed (but quality) gothic overtones of the script.

Another key to the game's success is the puzzle-solving, which though derivative of other genre favourites, also offers some surprising innovations, all stemming from the range of abilities that can be added to your symbiotic weapon, the accursed soul reaver. Other than that, it's a fairly straightforward time-hopping, soul-reaving romp, with hundreds of pathetic mortals to dispatch and vast gothic environs to explore. But the thing that separates *Soul Reaver 2* from other games of its ilk is pure polish and a refreshing air of quality throughout, and for this price, you can't go wrong.

Anthony Holden

PCZONE VERDICT

86



Kingpin is one of the most controversial games of recent years.

KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

ARRIVING SO SOON

after the genre-defining *Half-Life*, history may judge *Kingpin* harshly. Largely renowned for pioneering use of foul and abusive language, as well as unprecedented levels of violence, it would be easy to dismiss it as an exploitative, linear first-person shooter. That would be doing it a disservice though, as there is much here to recommend. The swearing is in keeping with the faux-gangster setting, the bloodletting is extreme enough to make you question your motives, and the graphical style evokes a particularly squalid atmosphere.

There are some satisfying weapons available, including the superb flamethrower, latterly reproduced in



Return To Castle Wolfenstein. Some effort is made towards character interaction, with sidekicks available for hire, and while it doesn't work perfectly all the time, it is far from unmanageable. The action kicks along at a fair pace, augmented by the stoner beats of Cypress Hill, and it's simply a fun experience, be it coshing a tramp to death with an iron bar, or trading obscenities with a prostitute.

There is still a reasonable online multiplayer scene, but the single-player game alone is worth five quid of anyone's money, and *Kingpin* is among the handful of games that I've actually completed more than once. Praise comes no higher.

Steve Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

80

ANACHRONOX

■ £12.99 | Pub: Eidos | ETA: Out Now

ONE LOOK AT the graphics and you might be forgiven for thinking *Anachronox* is a three or four-year-old title, rather than one. And with good reason. It uses the *Quake II* engine – complete with ugly, clunky textures – and it gave *Daikatana* a run for its money in the most-delayed-game-from-Ion Storm stakes. But it's also an endearing RPG in the *Final Fantasy* mould, complete with turn-based combat. The story isn't particularly original (a loser private investigator caught up in a case that turns out to affect the future of the universe) but the mild sense of humour and *Blade Runner*-inspired city banish the poor graphics from your thoughts.

The writing is sharp and there's a touch of *The Nomad Soul* exploration as you investigate the sci-fi environments, buzzing with alien low-life. At times it plays like an old-fashioned point-and-click adventure game too, which is no bad thing. Keeping up with console RPG leanings, the game is littered with subgames and, although the turn-based combat isn't its strongest point, at least it avoids *Final Fantasy*'s annoying random encounters. It does make you run around from one part of the city to the another doing silly errands as part of essential subquests but, overall, *Anachronox* is an overlooked bucket of goodness.

Mark Hill

PCZONE VERDICT

78



Learn to look past the ugly textures. There's a good game beneath.

STARTOPIA

■ £12.99 | Pub: Eidos | ETA: Out Now

I, MARTIN KORDA, would like to right a wrong. A heinous wrong, that was committed in this very magazine, one score and one issue ago. Back in issue 104, we awarded *Startopia* a solid if unspectacular score of 76 per cent. "Too hard to get into", was the main criticism of this god-game, based around the running and expanding of a space station hotel. Which, to a point, is fair enough. It certainly does take a while to get your three floor pleasure-dome up and running, and yes a certain amount of patience is required as you wait for the huge variety of alien life forms to start trickling in and spending money in your establishment. But that's because it's a game of rare depth, which requires you to spend a bit of time thinking about what you're doing, rather than randomly positioning entertainment venues for your visitors.

With each race bringing with them their own advantages and problems, simply watching the aliens interact with each other and their surroundings becomes

fascinating, adding an extra dimension so often lacking from so many one-dimensional human-based god-games.

On its initial release, *Startopia* didn't sell too well. I only hope that at this price, the same fate won't befall this intriguing and highly entertaining management game.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

83



ET, babe magnet.

LEFTOVERS

PLEASE SIR, CAN I HAVE SOME MORE SIR?

Wait a minute. Wait a damn minute. Just what is going on here? This is usually the section in Replay reserved for the dredge, the sludge, the scum-off-a-rhino's-rectum garbage that lines the bins of game lovers the world over. But not so this month. Just take a gander at this little lot.

Project Eden (£12.99), puts you in control of a team of four highly varied special agents, charging you with keeping the peace in a gritty futuristic city of high-rise buildings, while uncovering the grotesque secrets of the world's lower reaches. Great game. Shame about the packaging, though (83 per cent).

Activision throws its gargantuan hat back into the budget ring with *Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds Saga* (£19.99), which I would tell you loads about, only the title's already taken up way too much space in this column. However, I will say that it's an entertaining if butt-ugly isometric RTS package, which features both the excellent original game and the considerably less excellent expansion pack, *Clone Campaigns* (82 per cent).

Also from Activision is the *Star Trek Action Pack* (£19.99), which features four games. Or one game (*Star Trek: Voyager: Elite Force*), two virtually identical games (*Star Trek: Armada I and II*) and an expansion pack (for *Voyager: Elite Force*) if you want to get pissy about it. Entertaining, but dated (78 per cent).

What Leftovers section would be complete without a couple of Sold Out entries? *Worms Armageddon* (£4.99) may look less appealing than an ape in a mini skirt, but it's still fiendishly entertaining arcade fun (70 per cent).

Carmageddon 2 (£4.99) was easily the best in the controversial racing series, but play it now, and you'll be wondering what all the fuss was about as you mow down hapless pedestrians (72 per cent).

But what's this, a stinker souring the rosy smell wafting through this month's leftovers? It smells of fish. It's called *Sea Monkeys*. You get to look after your own saltwater gibbons. It's £4.99, from Sold Out, and it's not very good (50 per cent). Enough said.



Project Eden



Star Wars: GB Saga



Martin Korda Carmageddon 2

UPDATES

A place for single-player redemption and multiplayer action

MULTIPLE CHANCES

What's all this about then?

Some PC games are exceptionally flaky on release, with bugs and omissions that are subsequently fixed over time with patches. When this happens we'll take another look and see if the score is worth upping. By the same token, massively multiplayer games are ever-evolving and because of this we'll be revisiting major releases to see what's changed over time.

This is also the place where we take a proper look at the multiplayer side of games. As we regularly review games before they go on sale, often there are no public servers up and running, so instead of telling you how we think the game is going to play we'll wait and do a proper multiplayer review here, outlining how many servers are up and how the game plays online.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

■ £34.99 | Pub: VU Games | Dev: Monolith | ETA: Out Now | nolf2.sierra.com | Players: 2-4

REQUIRES PIII 500, 128 Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card and a 56K modem **DESIRES** P4 1GHz, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card and an ADSL connection

Mark Hill was never much of a team player. And he doesn't even get to wear a mini-skirt this time

WHEN ALMOST every first-person game you care to mention goes the wholly unoriginal deathmatch/capture the flag route when it comes to multiplayer, *NOLF2*'s decision to

have only co-operative mode is refreshing. Up to four players can get together to rescue Miss Archer and, although this means trawling through the single-player levels again, there's loads of

evidence of the events you unleashed in solo mode.

Co-op modes are underused by developers, but the problem here is that the narrow corridor design of most levels doesn't lend itself to a four-man team. The second problem is that with such a small number of players you get stuck with beginners getting lost and stopping you from going on, and idiots who get a thrill out of sounding hard and insulting said beginners. Synchronisation problems and bugs don't help. It only really works if you have three mates to play with, so you can agree a starting time and play properly.

It's not surprising then that *NOLF2* isn't proving too popular online, with only a handful of servers running at peak times. This is set to change as soon as Monolith gets its deathmatch patch out, and there should be some pretty interesting modes popping along soon too. For now, though, stick to single-player.

MULTIPLAYER



"Is it just me, or is it cold out here?"



It's a nice change working with people online.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 122)	93
MULTIPLAYER SCORE	68
A good, if rushed, extra to a great game	

BATTLE REALMS: WINTER OF THE WOLF

■ £14.99 | Pub: Ubi Soft | Dev: Liquid Entertainment | ETA: Out Now | battlerealm.ubi.com/wow.php

REQUIRES PIII 400, 64Mb RAM and a 4Mb 3D card **DESIRES** PIII 800, 128Mb RAM and a 16Mb 3D card

Keith Pullin is delighted that the battle never ends



"Why hello boys. Care to come in and warm yourselves up a bit?"

WHY DO we like *Battle Realms* so much? Firstly, the amazingly simplistic yet highly tuned and easy to pick up gameplay means any old ham-fisted fool can have a go. Secondly, the incredible oriental-style graphics and animation bring the whole world to life in a way that has never been done before on the PC. And thirdly, the brilliantly inventive 'unit alchemy' technique means you can retrain existing warriors to create a veritable potpourri of weird and wonderful fighting creations. In short, it's not a game – it's a delight. And now, there's more.

The *Battle Realms: Winter Of The Wolf* expansion pack introduces a second campaign focussing on the plight of Grayback, the leader of the wolf clan. In short, you must help him escape the slave mines of the Lotus clan and defeat Yvaine, their evil leader. *WOTW* also offers new units and Zen powers for each of the game's three clans, meaning more Yin and, of course, more Yang.

Overall, *Battle Realms* provides one of the most complete RTS packages on the PC. What's even better is that both games are being

packaged together, so when you buy this expansion pack for £14.99 you get *Battle Realms* absolutely free.

There can be no beating about the bush – if you want a thoroughly original and enjoyable strategy game that's going to give you weeks of unadulterated entertainment, this is the one.

PCZONE VERDICT

FULL REVIEW (ISSUE 111)	86
COMPILATION SCORE	87
Let it snow	



The Business

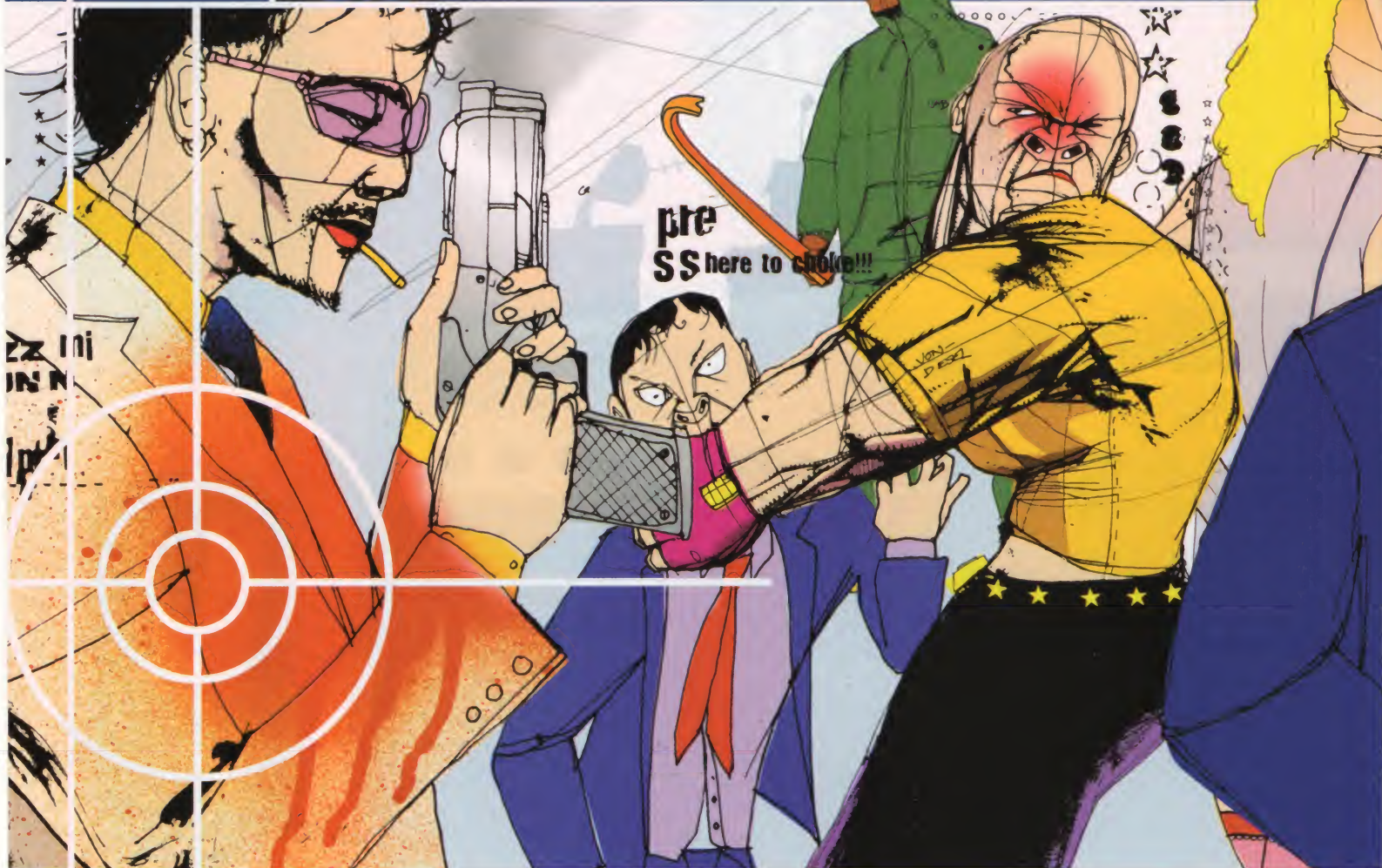
Give yourself the ultimate in competitive advantage, comfort and style with Microsoft® Wireless desktops and Optical mice. Get everything you've always wanted with a keyboard and mouse in one package with the Microsoft® Wireless Optical Desktop. Put the Microsoft® Wireless IntelliMouse® Explorer through its paces and experience unprecedented performance, accuracy, control and a clutter free desktop. And for when you're on the move, take the mouse into uncharted territory with the new Microsoft® Notebook Optical – the last word in comfort, style and mobility. The Wireless Optical Desktop offers a sleek dark finish with titanium accents and one-touch buttons that allow immediate access to the internet, email and multimedia activities*. And all Microsoft mice equipped with advanced optical technology let you Point, Click, Roll and Scroll with superior accuracy and maximum comfort on practically any surface. Distinctive and sophisticated – with so much advanced technology at your fingertips it's no surprise that we call them THE BUSINESS.

www.microsoft.com/uk/hardware/desktop



Microsoft®

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THE CONTENDERS

THIEF II
ISSUE 88 - 82%



KINGPIN
ISSUE 77 - 92%



GRAND THEFT AUTO III
ISSUE 116 - 95%



HITMAN 2
ISSUE 121 - 74%



MAFIA
ISSUE 119 - 92%



CRIME SUPERTEST

Games have allowed us to break just about every law ever written. Some have made it an artform. **Mark Hill** rounds up the **ZONE** team to assess the latest crime wave

GAMES are always courting or attracting undeserved controversy, but only a handful dare to really explore the criminal underworld that novels and films have portrayed for so long. It seems we're finally moving on from the archaic and infantile save-the-princess-from-evil-sorcerer and save-the-world-from-aliens scenarios. But can more mature themes survive in the ultra-commercial games industry? And do we have a moral case to answer?

Dave: We definitely seem to be getting more crime games, and most of them are good too. They're all about making crime glamorous and cool.

Martin: In the past, criminal games – like *Postal* for example – just used the theme for shock value, to mask the substandard game beneath.

Paul: I don't think they've moved on. *Grand Theft Auto III* is morally reprehensible.

Dave: But it's not frightened to lose sales because of that.

Martin: You mean gain them, don't you?

Dave: Well, a lot of people shy away from 18 certificates.

Mark: Let's start with a title that does rely on its shock value to hide a very ordinary game.

KINGPIN

Martin: For me it's close to the ultimate crime game, purely because it doesn't try to dumb down the crime in any way. It

gives you a gritty, real feel of what crime is all about.

Paul: But it was terrible.

Martin: It lets you do whatever you want.

THE JURY

PAUL
'LIGHTFINGERS'
PRESLEY



MARK 'THE
BRUISER' HILL



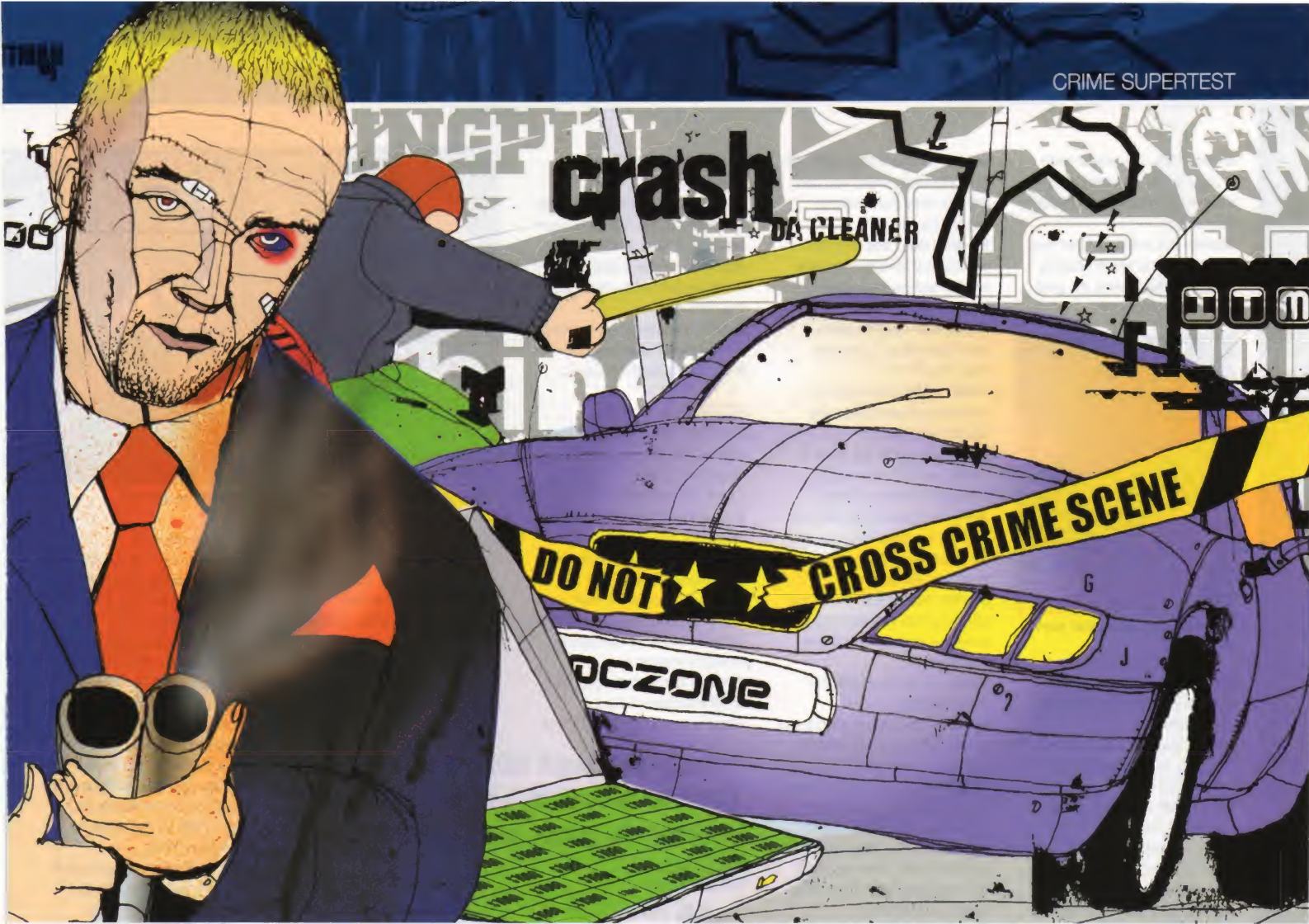
MARTIN
'MCKNUCKLES'
KORDA



DAVE 'FISTFUL
OF TWENTIES'
WOODS



Kingpin's not the greatest, but the flamethrower's awesome.



Mark: No way! It's just a very basic first-person shooter that lets you perform outrageous violence and you hear the word motherf****r constantly.

Dave: It wasn't terrible, I really enjoyed it at the time, but the crime element was rubbish.

Martin: But in terms of atmosphere you've got to admit it's the grittiest one out there.

Mark: That's true. It makes you want to take a shower afterwards. The whole brownness of it all and the Cypress Hill soundtrack are just depressing.

Dave: It's just a very short sample played over and over. The crime itself isn't that well

implemented. You can hit people over the head and occasionally steal something, but that's pretty much it.

Mark: The level design was truly criminal. Pull the lever, find the door, jump on the box...

Paul: It was a game of its time.

swearing thrown in for added controversy.

Mark: The urban environment, although not quite real-world, was a refreshing change from all the sci-fi and fantasy.

Paul: But you need an environment where you can live

"It gives you a gritty, real feel of what crime is all about"

MARTIN KORDA
ON *KINGPIN*

Everyone was doing shooters after the success of *Half-Life*, and *Kingpin* was a reaction to the safe world they represented, with a bit of violence and

without crimes to make it fun. In *Kingpin* you either commit the crimes or there's no game.

Mark: The fun of *Grand Theft Auto III* is that it's a realistic world with rules you can break. In *Kingpin* there are no real-world references, just levels with people to shoot. It's the most morally repulsive of the lot.

Dave: Nothing redeemable about it.

Martin: Which is why I think it's the ultimate crime game in terms of recreating the visceral, unpleasant feel of street-based crime. All the rest are just glossy versions of crime.

Mark: But surely crime is supposed to be fun?

Dave: It is extremely gritty, the Abel Ferrara of this lot.

Mark: More like the New York Ripper of the lot.



It doesn't have the charm of the original but *Thief II* has its share of tense moments.

THIEF II

Dave: It wasn't as good as it should have been.

Mark: They got rid of the thing people hated most about the first game, the zombies, but

somehow it just doesn't have the charm of the original.

Paul: It's not that much of a crime game really. It's a fantasy world where you creep around stealthily. The stealing part of it



Who stole all the pies, and subsequently ate them?

is secondary, the whole point is you saving the world from these mechanoids or whatever they are.

Martin: But unlike *Kingpin* you can at least go round stealing stuff, and then spend the gold on better equipment.



Stealth is an essential part of *Thief II*.

Dave: They really should make it modern-day. It would be fantastic.

Martin: *Deus Ex* went more that way, being stealthy in a modern setting.

Mark: That's why I have high hopes for *Thief III* since Ion Storm is working on it.

Paul: It's supposed to be a *GTA* or *Mafia*-style big city environment with the freedom to go stealing anywhere.

Mark: Which would be amazing.

Dave: The thing is, the guy you play isn't really a criminal. He steals from evil aristocrats.

Paul: That's why so many of these games don't work. They try to moralise the crimes you commit so they have a good end. *Hitman 2* is the same; you kill evil people. That's why *GTA III* does work.

Mark: I have a big problem with this whole techno-medieval world. It doesn't work for me at all.

Paul: I like it. It's a nice change from the whole sorcery and dragons thing.

Mark: I felt more like a criminal in *Morrowind*, where you can actually steal from anyone just for the hell of it.

Martin: I don't see why the mechanical fantasy elements would stop you from feeling like a criminal.

Dave: With *Thief* it's just a level rather than a properly realised world.

Mark: In *Morrowind* they've created a proper believable society with rules.

Paul: And you're not given a moral justification for doing what you do, like in *Thief*.

Mark: It should be praised for introducing the whole stealth thing, which hadn't really been around before.

Martin: There's also the moral dilemma that you don't have to kill the guards – you have that freedom.

Mark: I think the combat is awful anyway.

Martin: But that in a way forces you to approach it differently than you would an FPS. It's about hiding, not confrontation.

Mark: I still think *Thief II* is a good game, but it has aged very badly. Although it does get very tense when you're in the shadows waiting for some guard to walk past.

Dave: I've never played a more

tense game. I just freeze in those situations.

Paul: Although sometimes they just stand within inches of your face and mutter to themselves.

Mark: For some reason I didn't enjoy the sequel as much as the first one.

Paul: It's because the freshness of the original idea has gone. It's the same with *Hitman 2*.

HITMAN 2

Paul: The first one didn't work perfectly, but it was so original.

Mark: It's a perfect idea for a game. You're hired to kill people and money is your motivation.

Paul: But this is basically just more of the same, with better production values.

Martin: I didn't really feel I was committing a crime as much this time, it feels more like you're trying to prevent one.

Dave: In the first one you had to kill innocent civilians.

Paul: Not so much had to, but

"It's a perfect idea for a game. You're hired to kill people and money is your motivation"

MARK HILL
ON HITMAN 2



you'd find yourself killing a Chinese waiter just to get

a classic example in a later level where you have to get into a hospital to kill a female doctor, which would be morally dubious. But then you see her in a cut-scene being really evil, so it becomes OK to kill her.

Mark: Surely that's the publisher's influence, trying to make it more mainstream and acceptable.

Dave: I spoke to the developers and they said they wanted to take it even further than the first game, but they couldn't because of the German and American markets.

Martin: The word 'hitman' doesn't even really apply



Mafia is a giant step forward for maturity in games.

his uniform. And after I'd done that I actually felt I'd done something wrong. That was the good thing about it.

Mark: You played the antihero, someone like Leon or Ghost Dog, with no morals, who just kills because it's his job.

Paul: But in the sequel everything is moralised. There's

anymore, does it?

Paul: I don't know why the game industry is subjected to these restrictions on creative freedom. The film industry isn't.

Mark: It's mostly independent films that can explore darker issues, but you don't really get independent games anymore because they cost so much money to make.

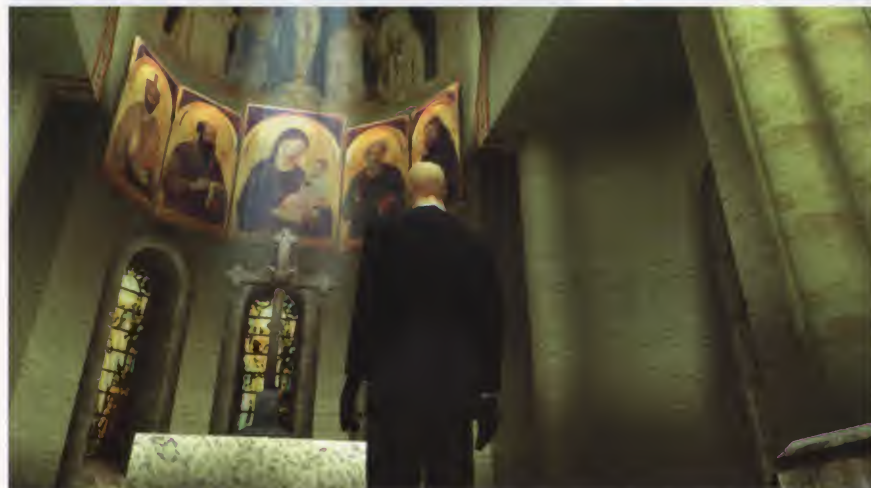
Dave: *Mafia* takes a step in the direction of more adult games. There's some swearing and some violence, but it isn't really gratuitous.

Paul: And when we say 'adult' we don't just mean sex and bad language, we mean intelligent and mature.

Martin: It shows how far we've come when you compare *Kingpin* to *Mafia*. Games are still a relatively newish media. Movies took a long time to get where they are now, and we're still getting there.

Mark: I think that's used as an excuse too often, saying that we're still in the infancy of games. It's not so much technical limitations that are stopping us from producing mature titles, it's talent, imagination and risk-taking.

Paul: There's so few people willing to take the chance and go that bit further.



A hitman as the hero saving the world? There's something wrong here.



Smile, you're about to die.



The fire fights in *Mafia* are superb.



"The real crime in it is the car racing bit. It took about 25 attempts to finish it"

DAVE WOODS
ON *MAFIA*

Dave: That's because if it goes wrong you're going to lose shed-loads of money. A lot of films make money, not many games do.

Martin: The way you have to find a proper disguise this time worked much better. You can't just go in somewhere with your bald head.

Mark: The thing is, if you were a hitman, would you really have a shiny head like that. Hardly inconspicuous, is it? Hasn't he heard of wigs?

Paul: But this time at least he doesn't get away with it. He has to find a good disguise.

Mark: It's not *Fletcher* though. And the first game wasn't perfect either. It's all told in classic film flashback. That doesn't mean it isn't great though.

Paul: They were a big mistake, especially because they happened so early on and it put a lot of people off. The ones after were superb.

MAFIA

Martin: Brilliant, but a little too Hollywoodish.

Mark: It is a very stylised game, in its storytelling as much as anything else. It's all told in classic film flashback. That doesn't mean it isn't great though.

Dave: It's done really well, not in a cheesy game way. A lot of

people have written in complaining that it's too slow. You need patience to get into it.

Martin: Although it's very varied and you get very immersed in it, it lacks some of the tense atmosphere of the other games. It doesn't have the same immediacy either. But those are about the only criticisms I can make of its crime elements.

Dave: But when you get into a proper shoot-out, it's made all the more exciting because you've just been driving in a really slow car.

Mark: For me the real essence of the game is in those shoot-outs. You can spend forever trying to complete one, but you never get tired of it. You get totally sucked in. Some of the cut-scenes get in the way though.

Paul: Oh, I don't know. I thought

they were really well directed, apart from the voice-acting being a bit wooden and everyone having these big mannequin eyes that never blink. It's as close to being a Hollywood movie as you can get, the way the camera moves, the way it's edited. I don't think I've ever been so involved in a storyline before. It's all just superb.

Dave: The real crime in it is the car racing bit. It took about 25 attempts to finish it.

Mark: I did it on my third or fourth go, which is why I didn't mention it in the review. Must have been pure luck.

Paul: It is hellish, but it's actually one of the best racing sims I've ever played. Better than *Grand Prix 4*. *Mafia* really gives you the feeling of being part of this gangster family. The



"Come on then, I'll take you all on."

IT'S ONLY A GAME

ARE GAMES MORALLY REPREHENSIBLE?



Paul: So how many crimes have we committed in real life?

Martin: I've urinated in a public place.

Dave: I've shoplifted, bought drinks for under age people, copied CDs and bought the first Bucks Fizz single...

Paul: I dread the day I get a license and a car, because *GTA III* will still be on my mind.

Dave: Richie was playing it while he was learning to drive. He didn't pass his test and didn't understand what he'd done wrong. "All I did was have two wheels on the pavement."

Paul: So are these games a bad influence on society?

Dave: It's the same argument as with films. There are going to be people who are susceptible, whether they're watching the news, playing a game or watching *Tom & Jerry*.

Mark: And *GTA* is more *Tom & Jerry* than anything.

Paul: But you still get things like a horrible squelchy noise when you run someone over. We're desensitised because we play this stuff all the time, but the average guy on the street is going to think it's sick.

Mark: The other side of the argument is that it allows level-headed individuals such as ourselves (cough, cough) to do the kind of transgressive things we'd never do in real life.

Paul: But kids do seem to be getting worse these days crime-wise.

Mark: But that's not because they've played a game and then go out and do it for real.

There are far more complex social issues at work here.

Paul: I don't think we can wash our hands of it that easily. We should claim more responsibility not just for games, but films and everything else.

Dave: We need a much stricter age control ratings system. ELSA is no good. We need it to be the same as videos, regulated by the BBFC. Games are becoming more realistic and film-like anyway, so it makes sense.

Martin: The problem is most people think of games as for children, so if a game isn't suitable for kids it shouldn't exist, rather than realising that there are some only adults should be allowed to play.

Paul: We need more games like *Mafia* that take those steps towards maturity so we can be respected as a legitimate form of storytelling media.

Martin: We need to make sure games with an 18 certificate aren't accessible to children.

Dave: You can never stop them from getting them, just as you can't stop me from getting all sorts of illegal things, but you do as much as you can to set guidelines for parents.

Paul: Parents still buy games for their kids without looking if they're suitable because "it's only a computer game".

Godfather isn't just about crime, it's also about doing a service to the community, in an under-hand way maybe, but that's what *Mafia* does. It has a real moral ambiguity, which is why I think it works better than the other ones.

Mark: And you can understand why your character does what he does, unlike most games. He's a complex human being rather than a stereotype, at least as far as games go.

Dave: And you're not encouraged to commit crimes willy-nilly like *GTA III*. I ran over a pedestrian and the police arrested me, which messed up my whole mission.

Mark: It's quite unforgiving, and very realistic.

Paul: It doesn't insult the gamer's intelligence, and that's so rare these days. *GTA III* is too gratuitous for my liking, while this has much more structure, which is what I want.

Mark: And it's got better hitman levels than *Hitman 2*.

could play it on the PS2 after using the mouse.

Paul: There's been complaints about the conversion but I can't see it myself. It's a great conversion.

Dave: Some people have had big problems with bugs.

Mark: The main thing about the game though is the total freedom to do whatever you want.

Dave: Apart from go inside buildings. Which is what *Vice City* is going to introduce.

Paul: That's what's missing from *Mafia*. Such a superbly detailed city, but you can't just go in any building, which annoyed me.

Mark: I've got to say *GTA III* is the most fun I've had with any game ever. The missions are fantastic but I could spend hours and hours just driving around, stealing cars, doing crazy things.

Paul: The big question is which music station do you listen to.

"Grand Theft Auto III is too gratuitous for my liking"

PAUL PRESLEY
ON GRAND THEFT AUTO III

GTA III

Dave: Best game ever. It's not realistic, but it doesn't try to be.

Mark: It's the Warner Brothers cartoon version of crime.

Dave: And it's very intelligent too. The humour in the car radio is fantastic.

Martin: For me it's a little too cartoonish. You don't feel as involved in the crimes as in *Mafia*, because of the way it treats the subject and the style of the graphics.

Dave: It's not a worse game for it though.

Martin: No, I'm just saying it doesn't feel as if you're committing crimes in the same way because it's dumbed down.

Paul: It treats crime as something good rather than something to be wary of, so in that sense it's the polar opposite of *Mafia*.

Dave: It can get very repetitive, and you wouldn't play it for long stretches, but for an odd hour here and there it's unbeatable.

Mark: I never get tired of playing it. I got to the last mission on the PS2 and gave up and then played through it all again on PC and completed it.

Dave: I'm really looking forward to *Vice City*, but I don't think I

Mark: I turned it off after a while.

Dave: I did too, but my favourite one is the reggae one, with the Scientist album. It's the best reggae in the world.



GTA III shows just how much fun crime can be.

THE WINNER IS...MAFIA



FREEDOM OR STORY?

It's a tough one to call this time, and it's very much a tug between the masterful storytelling of *Mafia* and the sheer fun and freedom of *GTA III*. For Paul *Mafia* is the best game: "It's got the most mature storyline I've played in a long time. But *GTA* is the one that implements crime the best."

For Dave it's the other way round: "*GTA III* is the best game but in *Mafia* I felt like I was involved in real crimes. It's realistic, mature and believable,

unlike *GTA*." Mark agrees: "*GTA III* is one of the best games ever made and I could play it forever, but *Mafia* incorporates crime better through its realism and complex main character."

For Martin, *Mafia* is the clear winner. "It offers such a diverse range of crimes to get involved in, it's really well presented and has a great story."

So it seems that this time, as far as crime is concerned at least, story wins over freedom.

Paul: I'm a Double Cleff man myself.

Mark: Nothing beats a bit of opera when you're in a mafia car.

Paul: If you have the MP3s from *The Italian Job* stick them in.

Mark: The only thing that annoys me is how much of a chump your character is. You do whatever you're told, get shafted, then go work for someone else and get

shafted again.

Paul: It is an arcade game.

The bottom line is it's pure fun.

Mark: You can complete missions in so many different ways too. More than any other game you get the feeling that there's a world out there you can run riot in.

Paul: You do learn the city. I know it better than my own

neighbourhood now.

Mark: At one stage of playing it I did see the world around me as *GTA III*. Like I'd see an ambulance drive past and think: "If I put this other car in front of it I can drag the driver out and run over those pedestrians over there with my sirens going."

Martin: It would make an interesting Reality Check.



"And if you ever park on a double yellow line again..."

THE VERDICT

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT TO PICK WINNERS, BUT WE FORCED THEM TO ANYWAY



PAUL
Mafia
GTA III



MARK
GTA III
Mafia



MARTIN
Mafia
Mafia



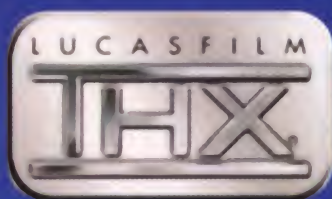
DAVE
GTA III
Mafia

BEST GAME
BEST USE OF CRIME

AUDIGY 2

CHOSEN BY GAMES - LOVED BY GAMERS

Paris Dakar™ Rally
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Secret Service: In Harm's Way
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Shadow Force: Razor Unit™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Mafia™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Neverwinter Nights™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Grand Theft Auto® III
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Soldier of Fortune® II: Double Helix
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Hitman 2 Silent Assassin™
Supports Creative EAX ADVANCED HD
Unreal® Tournament 2003
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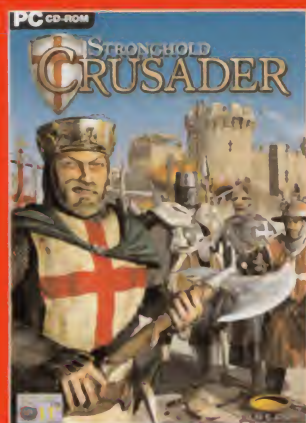


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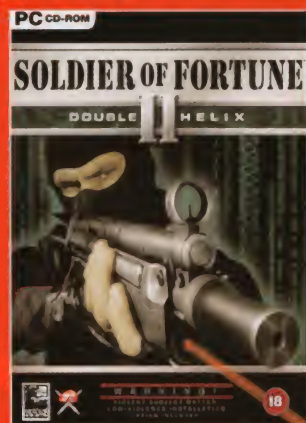


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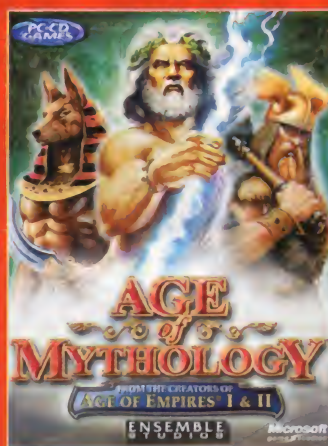
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WHATEVER TURNS YOU ON



HARDWARE

THE WARRIORS



■ **HARD WIRED** Steve Spence

▲ As gamers we're a pretty varied bunch, coming in all shapes and sizes, with very different budgets and tastes, and for the most part things are harmonious. There are however almost never-ending arguments between people about what the best kit is, be it AMD versus Intel, ATI vs NVIDIA or Spectrum versus Commodore 64.

In most cases both sides have valid arguments but also a reluctance to concede and give any ground, even when the counter-argument itself is quite valid – and it can end up doing your system, and your wallet quite a bit of harm.

There's no guarantee for instance, that because the last generation of a certain product was dominated by a company with a stripey pink and yellow badge that they will do the same next time around, and this brand loyalty, whilst maybe handy in the supermarket, can undo all the hard work needed when getting a topnotch gaming rig together.

Granted, it's always easier to be a big fish in a small pond, and rooting for the underdog can be fun, but when this gets in the way of our number one objective, games, then it seems almost spiteful, especially when it's our money at stake.

What we're trying to do at **PC ZONE**, is show you the best kit irrespective of manufacturers. We haven't always got the space to show you everything that gets released, but we're aware of all developments and if something good is happening you'll read about it here first – no matter who it comes from.

NVIDIA ON THE MOVE

Mobile gaming gets hotter with news of NVIDIA's new graphics chipset



Whack one of these in your laptop and you'll be laughing.



SINCE THE RADEON 9000 Mobile lost to the GeForce 4 Go 460 in our Mobile Gaming feature back in October, we've been looking for another mobile DirectX 8 chip to fill the gap and deliver convincing performance, alongside decent support for our favourite games.

That wait seems to have been shorter than we expected – with NVIDIA announcing the GeForce 4 Go 4200 – though the way in which they've gone about delivering it is very different from anything done previously.

Historically any mobile chip has had to be designed from the ground up – mobile GPUs have to run on less voltage, and produce less heat, but still remain competitive if they're going to succeed. On occasions where companies have opted to use a desktop part in a mobile form factor, the product has generally ended up crippled or even worse, caused stability problems through over-heating or under-volting.

SCROOGED

As we reported last issue, NVIDIA has refreshed its NV25 (GeForce 4) line with NV28 – basically GeForce 4 Ti with AGP8x. Hot on the heels of this comes the announcement of the NV28M – GeForce 4 Go 4200 – which basically uses the new NV28 desktop chip. One of the key features is a technology known as PowerMizer II, which enables the processor to

dynamically alter its frequency depending on how hard it's being pushed. So a 200Mhz NV28M can wind all the way down to 25Mhz, which helps conserve your battery and generates less heat into the bargain.

With the same full feature set as the desktop Ti4200, including Lightspeed Memory Architecture II and Accuvision Antialiasing, early benchmarking has put the new mobile chips up to 40 per cent ahead of ATI's quickest mobile part – the M9, which compares directly to the performance between the two desktop counterparts.

As to who will be supplying machines based on the new chips very little has been disclosed, though we're willing to bet the likes of Dell and Toshiba figure in the queue somewhere. The bottom line is that if you were thinking of buying a laptop for gaming this Christmas, it might be worth holding back a little while. We don't know when the new machines will be available, but early next year looks like being a safe bet.

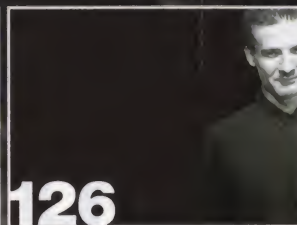
"A 200Mhz chip can wind all the way down to 25Mhz, which helps conserve your battery and generates less heat into the bargain"



116
GEFORCE FX
The first visuals from NVIDIA



118
ROUND-UP: SYSTEMS
The best PCs head to head



126
DEAR WANDY
Got a problem you can't fix?



130
BUYER'S GUIDE
The best kit, the lowest prices

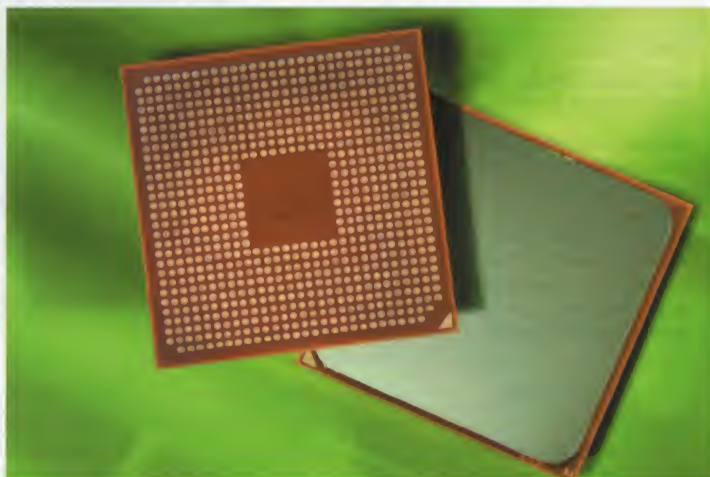
STOP: HAMMER TIME!

AMD continue its drive for low-cost high-performance processors

A NAME, and finally some news arrived this month on the consumer version of AMD's upcoming 64-bit 'hammer' architecture. Aptly named Athlon64, the company demonstrated 1.4Ghz samples at the recent COMDEX show in Las Vegas and hinted that 1.8Ghz CPUs are already in circulation with a handful of developers.

Based on Hypertransport, the new architecture has a number of new features and advantages over its predecessors. The most significant change is that the memory controller has been moved onto the die of the CPU, which could have a positive effect on the cost as well as allowing AMD to better control memory support for their CPUs.

Early benchmarks are showing silicon at these speeds to be squaring off against the likes of the 2.2Ghz Pentium 4s and with a target frequency of 2Ghz by the time the chips go into retail they could prove to be strong competition for the 3.2Ghz CPUs or thereabouts, which Intel will have out at around the same time. These new processors aren't expected until early next year and in the meantime you can expect at least one more revision of the AthlonXP. Codenamed 'Barton' the CPUs will introduce greater cache memory and a possible 200Mhz front-side bus.



AMD unveils its new processor architecture.

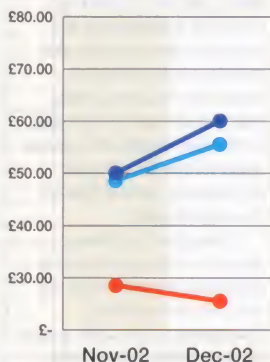
"By the time the chips go into retail they could prove to be strong competition for the 3.2Ghz CPUs"

PRICEWATCH

Check the latest price chart and make sure you don't pay over the odds

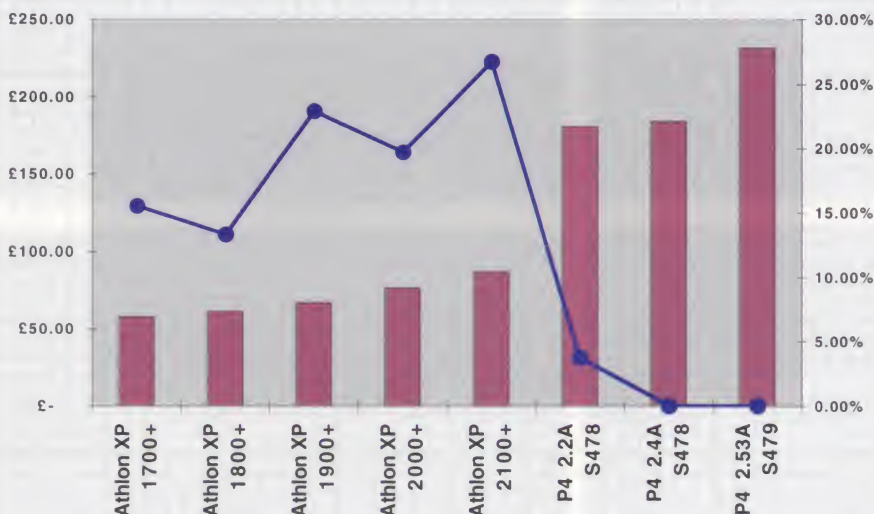
MEMORY

How much RAM have you got in your machine? If the answer is less than 256Mb then you should seriously consider an upgrade. If you're after PC133 SDRAM then it'll only cost you around £20. If you're not sure what memory your PC needs then just phone your local upgrade shop and ask them.



Price per 256Mb RAM:
 ● PC133 SDR
 ● PC2100 DDR
 ● PC2700 DDR

PROCESSORS: PRICE AND PERCENTAGE DROP



PROCESSORS

AMD continues to show Intel the way in terms of aggressive pricing. The gap between the two chip

giants is bigger than ever and although Intel still hold the high ground in terms of raw performance there's no doubting

that AMD offer the most in terms of price and performance. As ever, you pays your money, you makes your choice.

SNIPPETS

MICROSOFT SET-TOP

Microsoft has obviously been reading this hardware section over recent months, with news that it's launching Windows XP Media Centre Edition. Unlike the normal operating system, which is driven by a mouse, Media Centre is manipulated by a remote control and effectively turns your PC into a set-top box. At present, the software will only ship on the machines made by Microsoft's partners, which in the UK includes the likes of Alienware, Gateway and HP.

TOWERING INFERNO

The CDM-751 looks like a normal CD tower, but with USB ports at the rear. Hook it up to your PC, install a small application, and you can catalogue the contents of the 75 trays. If you're after a particular game you can just click on the name and the appropriate tray slides open. The towers can be daisy-chained as well and we think they're a snip starting around the £100 mark.

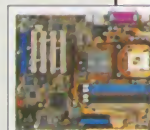


KEY DEVELOPMENTS

After the arrival of the MuVo last month, a slew of multifunction USB keys have begun to hit the market, with two in particular catching our attention. First up is the Clipdrive Bio (www.canram.com), a USB key up to 1Gb in size with a built-in biometric fingerprint reader, for data encryption and windows authentication purposes. Then there's the PI Protector (www.imaginelan.com) – a combination of key and application, which keeps your windows profile on removable storage. Plug it in and it integrates into IE, Outlook Express and other common applications, allowing you to use them as if you were at your own PC. Click on the application tray program and you can unplug the key – taking your files with you, leaving no traces.

NEW MOBOS

The age-old RAMBUS versus DDR debate takes a new turn this month with the release of the Granite Bay chipset from Intel. Featuring AGP8x and a new dual-channel memory controller, the new DDR platform boasts peak bandwidth equal to top-end PC1066 RAMBUS configurations using far more cost-effective DDR memories. The chipset was intended to be a workstation solution but vendors such as ASUS have already put together versions targeted firmly at gamers and enthusiasts, with boards such as the P4G8X. Fingers crossed we'll have one to pit against a top-spec RAMBUS rig next issue.



CAN YOU FEEL THE GEFORCE?

NVIDIA has finally lifted the lid on its new chipset, and the new GeForce FX looks like it's going to change your world forever

DIRECTX 9 IS here at last and with it the latest generation of graphics cards from NVIDIA. We've been recommending the GeForce 4 as the card of choice for gamers, and now that the next-gen GeForce FX is here, all the signs point towards NVIDIA continuing its dominance of the market.

As the next big milestone in PC graphics, the road to DirectX 9 gaming hardware has been predictably pretty. It began with the launch of Parhelia by Matrox which delivered some DX9 functions, albeit with lacklustre performance, and this was closely followed by the R300 (Radeon 9700) from ATI, which, while currently the quickest GPU on the shelves,

QUIET, ISN'T IT?

BECAUSE THERE'S NO POINT HAVING THE FAN ON IF IT'S NOT HOT

The card itself will be double-height, much like the OTES reviewed last month and is going to deliver a feature NVIDIA are calling 'silent running' where the board will dynamically change the fan speed depending on how hot or busy the GPU gets. So,

when you're pootling round Windows it will tick over quietly, but in games when the GPU is cranking out squillions of polys and the game sounds are piping out of your speakers, it can spin faster and remain unnoticed. Top stuff.

is hounded by driver bugs and game issues.

Things were extremely quiet in the NVIDIA corner with rumours that its next-gen chip was running late and wouldn't be seen until next year. Thankfully

these have proved unfounded and we've got the first stunning visuals to prove it.

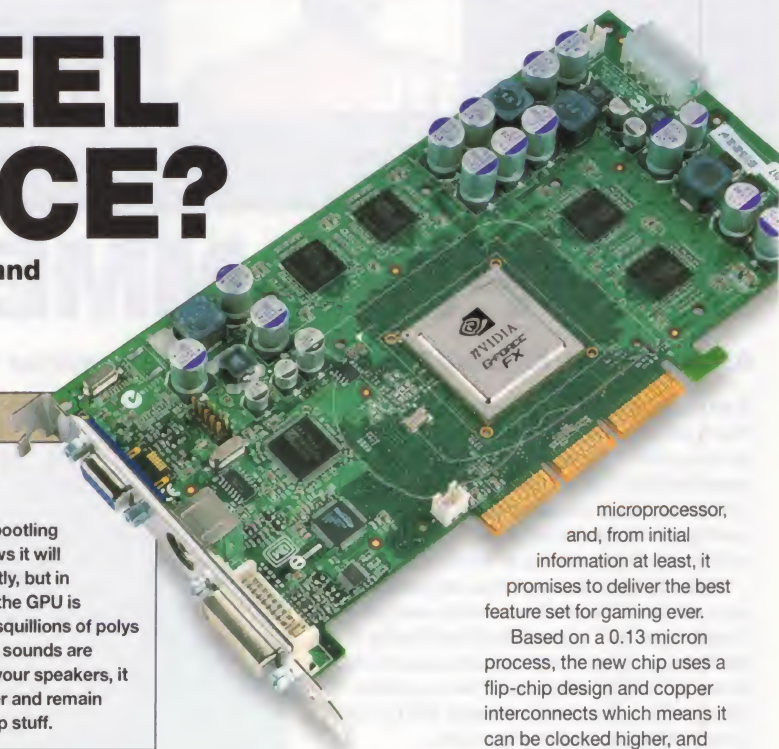
BACK OF THE NET!

As with the GeForce 4 family, there will be a load of different

cards built on the FX chipset, but before we delve into the specifics here's the full skinny on the GPU itself. With a transistor count of over 125 million, GeForce FX is three times as complex as the Pentium 4

microprocessor, and, from initial information at least, it promises to deliver the best feature set for gaming ever.

Based on a 0.13 micron process, the new chip uses a flip-chip design and copper interconnects which means it can be clocked higher, and remain cooler than the current competing GPU from ATI, the Radeon 9700 Pro. It isn't just faster – it's also got a load of cunning tricks up its sleeve to optimise performance and push every component to the limit.



TRUCK ME

REAL-TIME RUST! THE FUTURE ISN'T GOING TO LOOK QUITE SO SHINY...



A lot of games just look too good to be true. The real world isn't made up of perfect materials that don't age or degrade over time and finally, the GeForceFX is giving the power that developers need to reflect this in gaming environments.

The ageing truck demo demonstrates the flexibility of the advanced shaders which GeForceFX handles in real time. In the first frame the truck looks as good as new with shiny paint. After some time (the second frame) the paint begins to bubble and crack, with rust appearing round the edges and in the creases of the metal. By the third frame the paint has totally lost its lustre, fading from the sunlight and eroded by the rust. Finally the truck is ready for the tip with rust everywhere, leaving little of the original paint.

To be able to do these effects in with a single set of shaders is revolutionary – to do it in real time a first. Developers will be able to use the same effect throughout scenes, and as the truck shows, eliminate the samey feel provided by static effects.

Memory bandwidth is a big problem on any 3D card and it's typically one of the first limitations or ceilings you'll hit when you ramp up the resolution or use features such as antialiasing or anisotropic filtering. A typical solution to the problem has been to compress z data (the depth in a 3D scene), which can do anything up to double the available bandwidth, but in many scenarios that isn't enough. To combat this NVIDIA has developed Intellisample technology. This encompasses all of the previous memory achievements as well as compressing both colour and z data with a lossless algorithm, which when combined with Samsung DDR-II memories running at 1Ghz provides a stonking 64Gb/sec effective memory bandwidth.

Compare that to the memory bandwidth of the Radeon 9700 cards, which sits a tad below 20Gb/sec, and you've got a whole lot of extra bandwidth to play with. The difference is quite significant – in real-world terms it means you should be able to enable antialiasing with a zero performance hit. Looking to the future it means that you can expect to see real-time cinematic style animations (see the Changing Faces boxout) on your desktop PC. Blown away by *Doom 3*? Wait to see the stuff that's going to follow it.

JURASSIC PARK

All that bandwidth would be pretty useless without some pretty pixels to throw into it, but the new chip doesn't shirk there either. As with Radeon 9700, the GeForce FX is a DirectX 9 chip but the similarities end there. GeForce FX supports vertex and shader capabilities well beyond the DX9 prerequisites, dubbed Pixel Shader 2.0+ and Vertex Shader 2.0+, the plus symbol denoting the added capabilities. GeForce FX also delivers true 128-bit floating-point accuracy throughout its pixel shaders (as opposed to the 96/128-bit rounded accuracy offered by Radeon 9700/9500) which could give it the visual edge over ATI's latest offering. Programmability has been increased too, with the new GPU supporting shaders of up to 2048 operations (1024 colour instructions, 1024 textures) in length – ten times the length


"With a transistor count of over 125 million, GeForceFX is three times as complex as the Pentium 4"

and complexity of those supported on a 9700.

The chip itself has eight pipelines, meaning it can immediately process eight pixels per clock, double that of its previous flagship chip the Ti4600. While the actual core frequencies of the GPU remain undisclosed, we know that the chip can manage an amazing minimum of 51 billion floating-point operations per second in the pixel shader alone – that's about the same power needed to render 100 *Jurassic Park* dinosaurs at over 100 frames a second!

(NO) CASHBACK

While we don't yet know how performance will square up to the Radeons of this world, NVIDIA has stated that in the majority of conditions (non CPU-limited ones) GeForce FX will be anything between two and three times as fast as its previous top-of-the-line offering. That doesn't mean you'll see 45,000 3DMarks anytime soon (far from it, long before the 20,000 mark, 3DMark becomes heavily CPU-dependant), but it does mean fluid frame-rates in everything we're playing right now, and it will make the GeForce FX the card for forthcoming blockbuster shooters like *Breed* and *Doom 3*, both of which are going to provide all the DirectX 9 eye candy you can handle.

It's not just flashy facts though. We've already seen what the chip can do, and you can get a pretty good idea from looking at the images on this page. Imagine these running in real time and you get the idea – cinematic-style gaming is just around the corner. As always, initial prices might be high (£300 or thereabouts we reckon) but the bleeding edge has always come at a premium – that's just the way it is. With any luck we'll have one of these bad boys in our hands pretty damn soon for a full review next issue. 



CHANGING FACES

WANT PROOF THAT THE GEFORCE FX IS GOING TO ROCK? JUST CHECK OUT THE EXPRESSIONS ON THAT



One of the hardest things to mimic on a PC is the human form. Racing cars, robots and scenery are all comparatively easy because the subject matter is so diverse. Move a door in a racing car a couple of inches and no one can tell the difference. Misplace a facial feature and your character looks like Picasso has been at it with the paintbrush.

Historically models of people have always been limited by texturing and poly counts, and this

is something GeForce FX with the DirectX 9 API promises to change. Comprising over 250,000 polygons and 89 'bones', Nymph uses tons of advanced shader effects to produce the most realistic real-time humanoid forms we've seen.

Imagine characters like this appearing in your games and you can see why we're getting so excited about the GeForce FX. Conveying emotions by shifting facial expressions will provide the immersion current games are lacking.

SYSTEMS

If your PC is looking a bit long in the tooth it could be time to take the plunge and replace the whole box. Steve Spence looks at five of the best systems your money can buy



AREA-51

■ Manufacturer: Alienware | Price: £2,584

Phone: 0800 279 9751 | www.alienware.co.uk

ALIENWARE is a relatively new name to the UK, having only launched properly at the start of December. With its roots firmly based in the US, the company has developed a strong brand, synonymous with high quality and extreme performance for the relatively well-to-do gamer.

Judging by the numbers, the Area-51 is quite clearly the fastest machine we looked at, boasting the new Hyperthreading-capable Pentium 4 processor running at 3.066GHz with 512Mb of PC1066 RAMBUS and a Radeon 9700. Aware of the current lack of support for Hyperthreading (HT) within games, Alienware go so far as to install an HT-capable build of

Windows but then give you the choice as to whether it's enabled or not, which is pretty thorough to say the least. This attention to detail is reflected throughout the package, with dedicated games support just one of the myriad of after-sales services buying from Alienware gives you access to.

Sound is provided by the Audigy2 platinum and is piped out of an awesome set of TXH-certified Klipsch 5.1 speakers. With a subwoofer weighing more than some of the other PCs they deliver a truly rounded bassy sound and make DigiTheater DTS and MegaWorks sets sound wussy at best.

One of the most striking things about any Alienware

system is the strong visual branding. Offering a wide range of custom metallic and semi metallic paint colours, the Alienware case, mouse and keyboards are supplied painted in the same colour with small Alienware decals on both. Incidentally they're not just spraying up any old mouse but the PCZ Best Performance Intellimouse Explorer III – looking better than ever.

As the benchmarks show, the Area-51 nails the competition quite comfortably, only losing marginally in the storage tests of PCMark. That doesn't mean to say the IDE is at all slow, in fact those numbers themselves are relatively high, but with PCs like the Holly boasting a RAID stripe and

others ATA-133 controllers, it maybe puts those numbers out of context a little.

Overall, we really like the whole concept of the Alienware experience – being a gamer-focused company it goes that little bit further and seems to have thought outside the proverbial box. They're not the cheapest, agreed, with this system costing double what most of you would want to spend, but if you've got the cash to splash and want something slightly different on your desk accept no other.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **92**
The best a man
can get



OK, it's Christmas time, and you're dribbling at the thought of the new games Santa's going to drop down your chimney, but there's one teeny problem – that P166 of yours with the 3DFx Voodoo is dead

in the water and unless you're happy playing *Championship Manager* for the whole of 2003 you're going to need to sort your PC out, and quickly.

The idea of a DIY upgrade is all well and good, but when

you get down to it it's sometimes cheaper and generally easier to replace the whole thing.

Don't just scoot out to the High Street though, you can find better and cheaper PCs

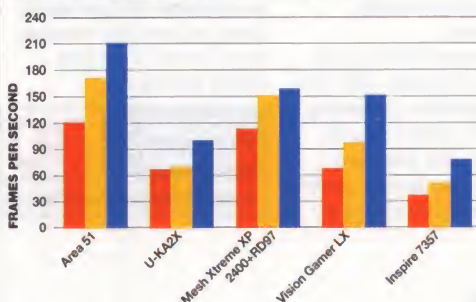
on the end of the phone or the Internet and there are loads of companies willing to put together a dedicated games box for you.

But who do you turn to? And what do you buy? A PC

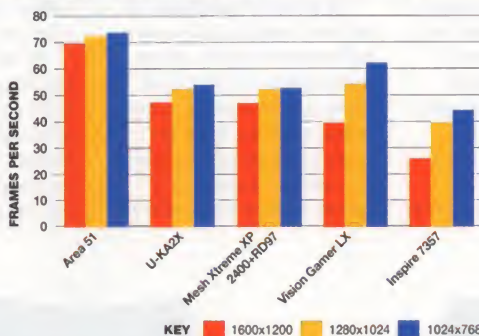
can cost you anything from about £500 up to £5000 and it's easier than you'd think to end up buying a turkey. Thankfully, as always, we're here to lead the way with five of the best gaming PCs money can buy.

BENCHMARKS

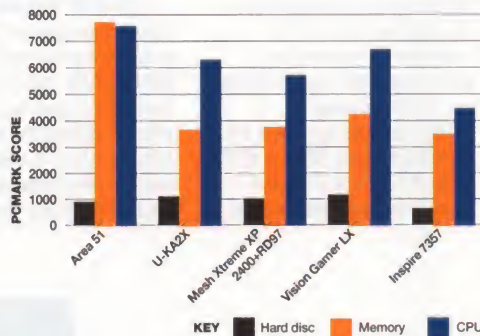
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 FLYBY (2X AA)



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003 BOTMATCH (2X AA)



PCMARK 2002



U-KA2X

■ Manufacturer: Holly | Price: £4,113

Phone: 01375 397220 | www.hollycomputers.co.uk

WHEN you're going to the expense of buying a new PC, especially one that costs this much, the last thing you're going to want to do is invest in new furniture to go with it. And while it might sound like extreme advice, the U-KA2X, and its three-headed screen set-up, is so heavy that you might need to do just that. The first desk we put this on bowed alarmingly and looked like it could crash to the floor – not good when you check out the accompanying price tag.

In a way, this particular configuration from Holly is more

of a concept PC than a system you'd necessarily buy. It shows you what's possible and some of the elements are compelling. Based around three 18" Philips TFTs, mounted on a single cast iron stand, the whole objective of this system is to create the most immersive gaming experience, rather than obscene frame rates.

The PC is aimed at the enthusiast, built inside a soundproofed aluminium case and a co-ordinated black and silver colour scheme. In terms of top of the range peripherals you

get a Wireless Microsoft Keyboard, Intellimouse Explorer III and a n50 SpeedPad from Belkin for all your gaming needs.

Inside the box this is the only system that's using the Matrox Parhelia graphics card. This is because it's the only card that supports 3D acceleration across this many screens, but it does mean the system doesn't perform brilliantly in our gaming benchmarks. Fourth and costing over four grand isn't impressive, but that doesn't mean it's a slouch. With an AMD 2700+ under the hood and a new

KT400 motherboard, it shifts into a comfortable third overall.

It still remains to be seen if any other manufacturers follow in Matrox's footsteps with a three-display solution, and it could be that the whole surround gaming theme isn't going to get past this initial stage.

With a well tweaked configuration we got to run *UT2003* quite happily but we reckon you're going to need a lot more welly to play anything like *Doom III* on a system like this without it looking like a three-screen wide slideshow.

Looking at the spec, it almost feels like Holly have over-dressed the U-KA2X, only missing the cappuccino maker and kitchen sink to make your life complete. But does it?

While we think three screens adds that certain edge to certain games, it's sheer overkill for pretty much everything else. A super-wide desktop itself is novel but with only a handful of games supporting this type of configuration and no real signs of future support from developers, the whole thing is a bit of a damn squib.



PCZONE VERDICT 61
More concept than a must-have machine

XTREME XP 2400+RD97

■ Manufacturer: Mesh | Price: £1,350 | Phone: 0870 046 47 47

www.meshcomputers.com

MESH is one of the oldest and largest system builders in the world and unlike a lot of other companies they sell direct to the public, which gives you the opportunity to build a custom machine from the ground up, while paying slightly less for the privilege.

This particular system is the Xtreme XP 2400+RD97, a KT400 based PC with an AthlonXP 2400+ processor, the top-end

Radeon 9700 and 512Mb DDR333 RAM, and at under £1,400, it makes for a good mid-top range offering.

Opting for the new Audigy2 platinum soundcard, Mesh has included a set of the new 6.1 Inspire 6700s from Creative. They sound great but we had a problem placing the sixth satellite, which is meant to be situated directly behind you – rather tricky if you've got a PC in

a lounge or a shared room. 6.1 sound might be the newest standard but we're still convinced it's overkill.

As far as the peripherals go we were disappointed to see a ball-mouse in the box. It's no major shakes but by now it's pretty obvious that even a cheap optical offering is better for pretty much any gaming related play and as we asked for a games machine this is what we

expected. This is the difference between a straight systems manufacturer and a company like Alienware who build for gamers and know exactly what you want.

As for its benchmark scores, the Xtreme showed up well in the gaming tests without exceeding expectations. What it does do, though, is provide everything you need to play the best games you can buy at the moment as

well as providing a solid foundation for the first few waves of DirectX 9 games. We'd be pretty surprised if you had any problems with the likes of *Breed* or *Doom III* for example, but as with any PC it's not entirely future proof.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **80**

Solid if unspectacular



SPECIFICATIONS

NAME	MANUFACTURER	PRICE	PROCESSOR	MEMORY	MOTHERBOARD	GRAPHICS
AREA-51	Alienware	£2,584	Intel P4 3.06	512MB PC1066	ASUS P4T533-C	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128Mb
U-KA2X	Holly	£4,113	AMD Athlon XP2700+	512Mb DDR333	Epox-8K9A2	Matrox Parhelia 128Mb
MESH XTREME XP 2400+RD97	Mesh	£1,350	AMD Athlon XP 2400+	512Mb DDR333	Asus A7V8X-A-L	Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 128Mb
VISION GAMER LX	Multivision	£1,644	AMD Athlon XP 2700+	512Mb DDR333	Leadtek nForce2	NVIDIA GeForce 4 Ti 4800
INSPIRE 7357	Systemax	£599	AMD Athlon XP 1700+	256Mb DDR333	MSI KT4V-L	Connect 3D ATI Radeon 9000 Pro 64Mb
NAME	KEYBOARD	MOUSE	MONITOR	SPEAKERS		
AREA-51	Logitech Internet Navigator SE	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer III	20" Mitsubishi Monitor	Klipsch 5.1 THX		
U-KA2X	MS Wireless	Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer III	18.1" Philips 180P2G TFT	Philips A3.600 Acoustic Surround Power		
MESH XTREME XP 2400+RD97	MS Internet	MS Intellimouse	19" Mitsubishi DPRO 920	Creative Inspire 6700		
VISION GAMER LX	Logitech Cordless	Logitech Cordless	18" Iiyama AS4637UTBK TFT	Creative Inspire 5300		
INSPIRE 7357	Systemax Logitech	Systemax Logitech Wheel Mouse PS/2	17" CTX EX700F	Videologic ZXR-500		

VISION GAMER LX

■ Manufacturer: Multivision | Price: £1,644
Phone: 0870 220 28 22 | www.multivision.co.uk

WHEN a manufacturer sets out to build a really top-notch PC, the machine has to squeeze every last drop of performance from a balanced set of components for it to really shine, and from the looks of the spec that's exactly what Multivision have tried to do with their Vision Gamer LX.

Using the Athlon XP 2700+, currently the fastest AthlonXP processor available, the system is based around a LeadTek nForce2 motherboard which offers key features including

AGP8x and Dual DDR, along with 512Mb and the AGP 8x Ti4800SE graphics card.

Aside from the standard fare of a camel-coloured steel case, the other components are quite smart, comprising of an 18" TFT from Iiyama, a set of Inspire 5300 5.1 speakers from Creative (driven by the Dolby Digital 5.1 Soundstorm on the nForce 2) and a wireless Logitech Desktop keyboard and mouse combo. We're not too keen on the idea of a radio mouse for gaming, but if the only component needed to

round off the package is a new rodent then you're still doing pretty well.

Considering that the CPU and memories on the Holly and Multivision systems are the same, it's quite surprising just how much quicker the nForce2 system was in the PCMark benchmarks, beating it in all three areas, most significantly in the hard drive scores, where the single-drive Multivision system thrashes the Holly.

An honourable mention is also due for the memory scores,

with a 15 per cent lead again for the nForce2.

Delving into the game benchmarks the Ti4800 holds its own well, exceptionally so when you consider that the board consists of an AGP 8x NV25 clocked at Ti4400 speeds with a 64Mb frame buffer. That's enough to maintain a minimum of third place in the scores, eeking into second place, slightly ahead of the Mesh in the first two Botmatches.

And, while the Ti4800SE isn't going to stand up against the

likes of the Radeon 9700, it clearly suits the Multivision system perfectly for current DX8 games, and before long could be upgraded to something such as the GeForce FX with minimum fuss.

Overall, this is a good, solid gaming package at a very reasonable price.

PCZONE VERDICT **90**
Highly recommended and very affordable



NETWORK	SOUNDCARD	CASE	HARD DISC	CD-ROM/RW	DVD-ROM
Onboard	Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Platinum	Steel, Custom Painted	120Gb	Lite-ON LTR-48125W	Lite-ON LTD-163D
Onboard	Sound Blaster Audigy	Aluminum, Black Brushed Finish	80Gb IBM Deskstar	TX 48x24x48 BP CDRW	16x40 Pioneer DvD-106S
Onboard	Sound Blaster Audigy 2 Platinum	Steel, Plastic Covered	Maxtor 120Gb	TEAC 48X16x48 CDRW	LG 16x
Onboard	nForce2 MCP-T APU	Steel	UDMA 100 120Gb	TX 48x12x48 CDRW	16x
Onboard	KT4 Ultra 5.1	Steel	Samsung SP 4002H 40Gb	40x12x40 CDRW	16x
GAME CONTROLLER	EXTRAS	EXTRAS	EXTRAS	EXTRAS	EXTRAS
N/A	Gear Grip PC LAN Carrystrap	25ft Cat-5 network cabling	Alienware T-Shirt and Owners File		Everglide Alienware Mouse Mat
Belkin Nostromo Speedpad n50 scanner	Ergotron DS100				
Logic 3 Gamepad and Joystick	56K Modem				
N/A	Smartlink56K Modem				
MS Sidewinder Gamepad	Systemax 56KPCI V.92 Hardware Modem				

INSPIRE 7357

■ Manufacturer: Systemax | Price: £599

Phone: 0870 727 2130 | www.systemaxpc.co.uk

SO your numbers didn't come up in the national lottery? Not to worry, Systemax have a solution in the shape of their Inspire 7357. Weighing in at just under £600, don't expect this system to break any land speed records, or for that matter intimidate any nearby supercomputers, but then, it won't break the bank either.

It's another Athlon-based system, this time clocking in at 1700+, though with only 256Mb of RAM we'd suggest an immediate upgrade to 512Mb – it won't bump up the cost by much and makes a real difference to the performance.

For your money, Systemax provide a 17" CTX monitor paired up with a Connect3D Radeon 9000 Pro graphics card, which means support for the current breed of DirectX 8.1

games. Sound comes care of the Videologic ZXR 500 5.1 range of speakers powered by the onboard integrated 5.1 audio, which when compared to the other systems is relatively uninspiring, but for less than half the cost of the next cheapest PC, is still relatively adequate.

Considering the budget nature of this machine it fared pretty well against the competition, with playable frame rates in *UT 2003*, and coming within 10fps of the Holly/Parhelio rig in a couple of the tests – for

half the Mhz of the Alienware system and a quarter the price it's none too shabby.

Looking to the future though, we're not sure just how long this spec will remain to be respectable, with DirectX 9 almost upon us and a slew of DX9 games in tow it could well be no more than a year before you're going to need a significant upgrade to continue playing games the way you want. Without coining the NVIDIA slogan too heavily, buying a gaming PC should

really be about ensuring you can play the latest games as developers intended them to be seen, and while titles like *Doom III* will run on GPUs like the 9000 Pro, there's a world of difference between running on a 9000 GPU and the likes of the GeForce FX and Radeon 9700 and you're likely to miss a huge portion of the experience.

So, in all, we couldn't say that we're overawed by the Inspire 7357, but it does a more than respectable job at a very reasonable price point. If you

really are struggling and you need a new machine desperately then this is good kit for the money. In terms of price and performance you can't beat it, as long as you're prepared to put up with the fact that you might have to invest a similar sum of money this time next year when things grind to an inevitable halt.

PCZONE VERDICT 79

A budget offering with a budget performance



CONCLUSION

THE WORLD IS FULL OF SHINY PCS, BUT WHICH IS THE GAMING DADDY THIS MONTH?

Buying a PC is a lot easier once you know what you're after, and hopefully we've given you a few ideas on what's out there and how much of a hernia it's going to give your bank manager. Don't forget that most manufacturers offer loads of a huge number of PCs each with different specs, so if you like something you see but it doesn't quite fit what you're after check out their websites or give them a ring and see if they can accommodate you.

So, that's it really – not much else to do except award a couple of honourable mentions in the form of the PC ZONE Recommended Awards. In



this case, we doff our hats to two of this month's participants – Alienware, which, although a newcomer to the UK, has developed a strong reputation for high quality and performance, of which their Area-51 bears testament,



and Multivision, which has put together a particularly balanced and impressive machine.

The bottom line though is that you get what you pay for. If you're low on cash, there are decent PCs out there



for you. But if you can afford to invest the extra now you're going to get a machine that will let you play games the way they were intended for the next couple of years. And what more do you want?

THE FASTEST GAMING MACHINES ON THE PLANET HAVE ARRIVED

THE AREA-51™ IS QUITE CLEARLY THE FASTEST MACHINE WE LOOKED AT™

-PC ZONE EDITORS' CHOICE AWARD



AREA-51™
DESKTOP GAMING

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor with HT Technology 3.06GHz
533 FSB and 512KB Advanced Transfer Cache
High-Performance Heatsink/Cooling System
Intel® 850E Chipset Motherboard
512MB PC-1066 RDRAM
Black Floppy Drive 1.44MB
200GB 7200RPM Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive
ATI® RADEON™ 9700 PRO 128MB DDR
AlienAdrenaline: Video Performance Optimizer
Exclusive Koolmaxx™ Video Cooling System
Sound Blaster® Audigy 2™ 6.1 Sound Card
Black 16X/48X DVD-ROM Drive
Black 48X/24X/48X CD-RW Drive
Black Dragon Full-Tower ATX Case 420-Watt PS
Black Internet Keyboard
Black Microsoft® Intellimouse Explorer 3.0
Intel® PRO/100 S Network Adapter
Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
1-Year Free Phone 24/7 Technical Support
AlienAutopsy: Automated Technical Support
Personalized Owner's Manual
FREE Exclusive Alienware® T-Shirt
FREE Custom Alienware® Mouse Pad
Optimized & Configured for High-Performance

£1,999.00

EXCLUDING DELIVERY AND VAT



AREA-51™
MOBILE GAMING

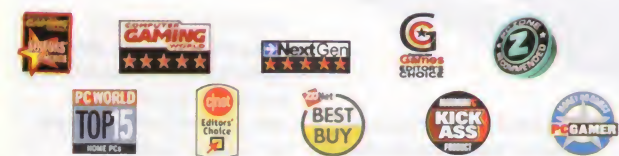
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor at 3.06GHz
533 FSB and 512KB Advanced Transfer Cache
High-Performance Heatsink/Cooling with Arctic Silver III
Intel® 845MP+ ICH3M Chipset Motherboard
512MB PC-2100 DDR SDRAM
Exclusive Metallic Majestic Blue Chassis
60GB Ultra ATA100 Hard Drive
15.0" UltraXGA+ TFT Active Matrix LCD
ATI® Mobility RADEON™ 9000 PRO 64MB DDR
AlienAdrenaline: Video Performance Optimizer
Removable 3.5" Floppy Drive 1.44MB
Removable 24X/10X/24X CD-RW/8X DVD Combo Drive
Sound Blaster® PRO Compatible with Wavetable
5.1 3D Surround Sound with S/PDIF Digital Output
Four USB 2.0 Ports and One IEEE 1394 Port
Microsoft® Windows® XP Home Edition
10/100Mb Ethernet LAN and 56K Modem
1-Year Free Phone 24/7 Technical Support
AlienAutopsy: Automated Technical Support
Personalized Owner's Manual
FREE Exclusive Alienware® T-Shirt
FREE Custom Alienware® Mouse Pad
Optimized & Configured for High-Performance

£2,099.00

EXCLUDING DELIVERY AND VAT



Choose from many
custom metallic colours!



WORLDWIDE INDUSTRY RECOGNITION ★★

Alienware® recommends Microsoft® Windows® XP.

ALIENWARE

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For More Information Call Free: 0800 279 9751

Specifications, and availability may change without notice. Monitor and speakers sold separately. Taxes and shipping charges not shown. Alienware can not be held responsible for errors in photography or typography. For complete information on warranty and support visit www.aliware.co.uk. For hard drives, GB means 1 billion bytes and accessible capacity may vary depending on configuration. For CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, CD-RW, and DVD+RW/+R drive(s), maximum data transfer rates may vary and discs created with these drives may not be compatible with other players. For modems and network cards/hardware, maximum achievable data transfer rates may vary. Award(s) and quote(s) listed do not pertain to a specific system or configuration. Intel, Intel Inside Logo, and Pentium are registered trademarks of Intel Corporation. All registered trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Actual case may vary in design.

WIRELESS OPTICAL DESKTOP FOR BLUETOOTH

■ Manufacturer: Microsoft | Price: £149.99 | www.microsoft.com/uk | Phone: 0870 601 0100

What do you get for the gamer that's got everything?

KEYBOARD

WIRELESS hardware has always been a bit of a mixed bag. Joypads, although crude mechanically, are generally pretty passable, while wireless mice are mostly laggy and inaccurate, everything you don't need in frantic first-person snipeage.

These problems happen because of the way the data is transmitted – instead of a funnel of electrons pushed down a wire at somewhere near the speed of light, radio mice rely on crude Digital Signal Processing and comparatively slow radio bands. This is fine for general desktop stuff but not when you need a fast response for gaming.

Enter Bluetooth, one of the best things to come out of the Nordic fjords in the last decade, and a wireless technology that provides greater bandwidth with much reduced latency.

The Wireless Optical Desktop for Bluetooth is the first consumer device for your Windows XP PC and it comes in three parts – a transceiver key (the USB Bluetooth device which you plug into your PC), a 'midnight blue' Bluetooth version of Microsoft's multimedia keyboard and a similarly coloured



version of the Wireless Optical Intellimouse Explorer.

Installation is pretty painless and the response from both devices is excellent – with no apparent lag the devices act just

like their wired counterparts. One important point is that Microsoft only supports Bluetooth under XP and there are no plans to extend this for older operating systems. This means you need to keep your old keyboard for BIOS tweakage or re-installing your OS.

That said, the overall package is excellent, although

expensive for two peripherals that are usually the cheapest you buy for your PC. For your money, though, you're getting the best 'wirefree' mouse and keyboard money can buy, plus a Bluetooth transceiver for your PC, which will support and connect to any other Bluetooth kit you get in the future.

PCZONE VERDICT 77

Wireless wizardry

CREATIVE MUVO

■ Manufacturer: Creative Labs | Price: £99.99 | Phone: N/A
www.europe.creative.com

An MP3 player so small you won't know you're carrying it

MP3 PLAYER

IF YOU'VE got a CD writer then you've probably found that you never use your humble floppy drive anymore.

There are some occasions though when a 700Mb CD can be overkill however. Take your average LAN party – you bring your PC, bung in a network card, but don't have a driver. Two options – spread anything up to 5Mb across a bag full of floppy discs or use a CDR and waste 600Mb plus on a paltry driver.

The times, they are a-changing and now there's a third option, that of USB key drives. These are basically non-volatile

memory cards with a USB interface. If you're running XP, all you have to do to get one of these working is to stick it in the right hole.

That's all good and well, but storage is a little dull as gadgets go, so Creative thought up the MuVo – a USB key drive, and then some. The MuVo comes in two parts, the key itself, and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two

halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.



It doesn't have an equaliser, or even a display, but playback is extremely clean and competent. The memory is non-volatile which means the battery is used solely for playback, and although the 64Mb capacity isn't brilliant,

it's plenty for backing-up important documents, shifting drivers between PCs and storing anything up to two hours of music. One of the best gadgets we've seen in a long time.

PCZONE VERDICT 82

Cheap and handy

SYNCMASTER 181T



■ Manufacturer: Samsung | Price: £599 | Phone: N/A | www.samsung.com

Get rid of your fat monitor, it's time to meet the new super-waif

TFT

A SVELTE TFT is every gamer's dream and panels are now capable of delivering the lag-free high-refresh output that games demand.

The 181T from Samsung seems perfect for the job too, costing less than our current best buy, the iiyama 4332 and being a whole inch larger diagonally. Spec-wise it's got all the hallmarks of a top-quality gaming display, with a response time of 25Ms, a contrast ratio of 500:1 and rated brightness of 250 cd/m2. The controls are mounted across a set of thin silver buttons across the screens base, and when using an analogue input (ie VGA) they provide all the adjustment necessary to get your games picture perfect. With a digital source (DVI) one touch of the auto button sets up size, orientation and balance of the display. While it doesn't feature any pivot ability, it is height adjustable – essential for getting the screen at eye level, and it

can be tilted through a wide arc for final adjustment.

As it's a silver and black unit the 181T would probably look best next to an aluminium case like the nForce-fuelled SS40G Shuttle (reviewed below) and a silver Intellimouse Explorer. The bezel is quite narrow and it has a relatively small footprint even for a TFT, which emphasises the minimalist image.

Throwing our usual set of video and gaming tests at the panel we observed none of the blurring or ghosting, which were characteristic of older-generation screens. In fact, the 181T managed to deliver a cleaner, crisper picture overall than our Best Buy from iiyama and this, along with the cost and the size means that it goes straight into our Best Buy spot.

PCZONE VERDICT 88
For our money it's the best TFT you can buy



SS40G

■ Manufacturer: Shuttle | Price: TBA | Phone: N/A | www.shuttle.com

Meet the tiny PC with a big bite

PC



HERE'S proof that PCs don't have to be gigantic to be good enough for gamers, as long as you're not bothered about the limited upgrade capacity. One month after the SS51G we've managed to get our hands on the first Shuttle

powered by the nForce2 motherboard.

The chassis of the case is identical to the Pentium 4 unit, providing a 5in drive bay and two 3in bays. This time the fascia is white with a pale green stripe, not as sexy as the blue of the other unit but it fits the AMD platform styling and image quite well.

Inside you get on-board GeForce4MX graphics, SoundStorm Dolby Digital 5.1 sound, and a single PCI and AGP 8X slot if you want to upgrade in the future. There's also a load of connectivity options including S/PDIF and Optical for your audio and LAN, FireWire and USB2.0 ports located between the front and back of the system.

Cooling is handled via Shuttle's patented ICE solution, which consists of a large metal plate and several heat pipes which connect up into a radiator and fan at the rear of the case. This time around they've opted for a separate fan inside as well,

which means this system is slightly noisier than the other Shuttle we've looked at.

Comparing performance against a full-size nForce2 board we found the SS40G to be very stable and well within ten per cent in most cases – basically, Shuttle has managed to successfully shrink the new architecture without compromising quality.

With prices projected a little under the £300 mark this isn't exactly a budget option, and with integrated GeForce4 MX would probably be best suited to building an entry-level system rather than an upgrade. But if you have the cash and want a sexy little nForce2 box to which you can painlessly add the likes of a GeForce4Ti or Radeon 9700, they don't come any cuter than this.

PCZONE VERDICT 89
Small and perfectly formed



DEAR WANDY

This month, our in-house quack looks at Windows XP networking and sound card troubles. Nurse, the screens please!

■ DR WHO? Phil Wand

LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us, and we, in turn, may well share it with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in-type thing.

Write to Dear Wandy, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JD

Email Address your letters to us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Dear Wandy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

NOT WORKING WITH XP

Q I have two PCs: an Athlon 1400 and an Athlon 650. Both run Windows XP Pro and are networked together using a single crossover cable. The first machine has an ADSL modem connected and I use it as my Internet gateway (the second connects through ICS).

The problem is that for the two computers to see each other, I have to keep running XP's Network Setup Wizard. They find each other without problem, but as soon as they are turned off and rebooted the file sharing no longer works but the Internet sharing does. When I go to My Network Places I can see the folders that I've shared on the other PC, but I'm not unable to access them. When I go to View Workgroup Computers the same thing happens: I see a pop-up message that says, "\xxx.xxx.xxx.xxx is not accessible. You might not have permission to use this network resource. Contact the administrator of this server to find out if you have access permissions." And: "Logon failure: the user has not been granted the requested logon type at this computer."

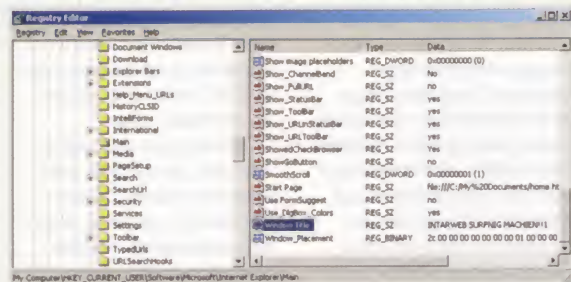
Neill Wilson

A The first thing I would do is ensure the right services are running on both machines. Right-click the My Computer icon and choose Manage from the pop-up menu, then select Services and Applications and check the status of Computer Browser. If it's not running, right-click it and choose Start. The next thing to try is to make sure NetBIOS over TCP/IP is enabled in your networking setup. Open the Network and Internet Connections control panel, double-click Local Area Connection, then double-click Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). Click the Advanced button, open the WINS tab, and make sure that the Enable NetBIOS

over TCP/IP checkbox has a tick in it. Versions of Windows from 2000 upwards shouldn't need a restart to activate these changes, so once you've clicked OK a few times try these settings out. If it's still not working you'll need to look at file sharing permissions. In typical Windows XP style it is assumed that you, the user, are a colossal idiot and require every bottom-wiping setting enabled by default. In this case it's something called Simple File Sharing, and along with metre-wide icons and patronising colour schemes it's like Microsoft treating you like a dickhead. If you want my advice, and want proper control of your PC, turn it off – I'd far rather you understood networking permissions rather than have Mr Gates hide it all from you. Open any Explorer (Winkey+E), click the Tools menu, and choose Folder Options. Open the View tab and clear the Use Simple File Sharing checkbox. Go back to your Explorer window and make a new folder in the root of your C: drive – we'll use this folder to test your LAN's behaviour rather than muck about with any existing shares. Right-click on this new folder, choose Sharing and Security, and click the Sharing tab. Click the Share This Folder radio button and enter a name for it. Click the Permissions button and make sure everyone has Full Control, Change and Read access. I have every belief that you should now be able to see this new folder from the remote machine and, if so, create new shares for the drives on both your machines.

TIP PROVIDED BY WANDY

Q Please excuse my stupidity, but I'm trying to remove the irritating ISP names I have stuck in the title bars of both Internet Explorer and



Don't stand for corporate bull****, listen to Wandy.

Outlook Express. I'm running XP and can't find the entries in the registry anywhere! I just want to remove the "Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by whatever". Help!

Rich

A The easy answer here is to click the Start button, click Run, type Regedit, click OK and then press CTRL+F to open the Registry Editor's Find dialog. Type Window Title in the box and hit Find Next. Wherever you see a value that contains the words "provided by" followed by the name of your ISP, double-click the entry to change it. You can in fact use this to change the words in the title bar to anything you like. Be creative.

SURROUNDED

Q I've decided to bring my existing Duron700/ GeForce2 system into the 21st century. The components I have ordered are, with my reasons in brackets, Gigabyte GA-7VXP (PC Pro 'A' List), Athlon XP2000+ (PC ZONE Best Buy), PNY GeForce4 4200, (PC ZONE Best

Buy) and Crucial 256Mb PC2700 memory. While awaiting their delivery I've been musing on a number of issues. Firstly, will my operating system now be the weakest link, Windows 98 SE? Should I consider getting Windows 2000 Pro or XP as soon as I can afford them? Second, are on-board audio chips any good? I have a Hercules Muse XL, which seems OK, but I'm getting a DVD player and want decent quality sound. The motherboard comes with AC97 six channel sound, does that compare well with good PCI card based 5.1 systems? Finally, the above mobo has RAID. Do the two drives have to be identical, ie same ATA rating and capacity? My current drive is a Seagate ATA 100 20Gb ST320413A. Somehow I doubt I could buy such an item now! I hope the above raises general issues/queries other readers might have, as well as my own specific ones.

Adrian Smithson

A Over time I've had fewer and fewer people write to me about Windows 98 problems (thrashing hard drives, slow interface, random crashes, Compatibility Mode, you know the drill) and I'm guessing this is because they've all upgraded to operating systems where such things don't happen. So in answer to your first

Now all you need is a bigger room.



"Windows XP assumes that you are a colossal idiot and require every bottom-wiping setting enabled by default"

"Every time I want to swap from loudspeakers to the headphones, I have to dig around at the back of my PC"

question, go for XP and switch to the more familiar interface once you've installed it. With regard to on-board audio, I've never had any trouble with on-board chips, but then I'm not a computer audiophile – my pocket money goes on chrome boxes for my lounge. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that expensive sound cards are a waste of money for most people. If you intend to listen to MP3s, play arcade games and watch flakey MPEGs, the cheapest audio card will do you just fine – spend most of the cash on Klipsch speakers instead. If you're into surround sound and enjoy the added atmosphere in your games, you'll want to spend more on a 5.1-compatible card such as our Budget Buy Gamesurround. But since you can plug this in later, my advice is to get your system up and running first, then worry about sanding down the rough edges. With regard to RAID drives being identical, it depends on the RAID controller. If you're going to be striping or mirroring drives, it's best to pair them up properly and be safe. Otherwise, it shouldn't be a problem to mix and match.

DUAL TYCOON

Q I'm looking for some advice please. I have a Pentium III 800 desktop and my sister has a Pentium II 233 laptop. We're looking for a way to link these together so we can



Transport Tycoon Deluxe: Paul Boland's letter started me playing this great game again.

play *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* head-to-head. Two options that we know of is a null modem cable and one of those new USB leads by Trust, but we are unsure which is the best way to go? Any help would be greatly appreciated.

Paul Boland

A As far as I'm aware, two people can play *Transport Tycoon Deluxe* over the IPX protocol. If you and your sister already have network cards in your PCs, all you need is a crossover cable to run between them. You then need to make sure that the IPX/SPX compatible transport is installed in your list of Network Neighborhood protocols. If you want to stay away from network cards and networking, you'll have to find yourself a null modem cable. Plug one end into the laptop, the other into your PC, and select the serial communications option from within *Transport Tycoon*. Sooner or later you'll need that network card, so now may be the moment to take the plunge and buy one. You can buy a home networking pack that includes two network cards and the cable for around £40. That said, the laptop won't take a PCI card. Given the 233 rating on your sister's machine, my guess is that it won't have an integrated port and so you will need to buy a PCMCIA add-in card that does the job for you.

WHERE'S DISC ZERO?

Q I recently bought an Athlon 1800+ base unit with an NVIDIA GeForce4 MX440 and a 16x IDE DVD-ROM. When I try to set up a number of games, during the installation I get an "Insert Disk 0 which contains data3.cab" error. These games worked fine before. I had a look around the Internet and one site suggested it was a problem with my Virus Checker, but when I

removed Norton Anti-Virus it made no difference. Can you please help?

Dave Middleton

A It's not the fault of your virus checker. It's more likely to be files left over from old installations in your Windows temporary folder. If you're using Windows 95 or Windows 98, your temporary folder is likely to be C:\WINDOWS\TEMP or C:\TEMP. If you're using Windows NT, 2000 or XP, you need to right-click on My Computer and select Properties, then open the Advanced tab. Click the Environment Variables button and look for the TEMP entry. Browse to that folder, empty it, then rerun the installation that was giving you trouble. By the way, do remember to reactivate your copy of Norton!

BACK TO FRONT

Q I'm a keen player of *Day Of Defeat*, and need to keep in contact with my teammates via a nice set of headphones with a built-in microphone. Now this is great, except every time I want to swap from loudspeakers to the headphones, I have to dig around at the back of my PC to switch the connections over. I've seen breakout boxes for the expensive Sound Blaster cards that can live in one of the front drive bays, and they seem ideal. But mine is a lowly SB Live 1024, and I don't have much cash to spare. Do you know of anything I can get so I can do all my plugging and unplugging on the front of my PC rather than at the back?


Ross Brooker

A Have to say that I don't. Although it's on the front of your PC, the cables from a breakout box run internally to your sound card, and unless your card has the appropriate internal connectors it's either a) not going to work, or b)



Breakout boxes are becoming increasingly popular. But why not bodge your own?

going to look messy. The DIY solution is to mount a 3.5mm jack into a plastic drive bay faceplate, run a wire from it out the back of your PC through a free expansion slot, then loop it back into the sound card. You can get all the stuff you need from Maplin, RS Components, or from CPC.

The other option is to buy a small disco mixer that plugs into your sound card and allows you to plug both your headphones and the speakers into the same output without ever having to swap them over. Again, check the Maplin catalogue, where you can pick up a small mixer for less than £20, or spend a little extra and get a box that'll be able to handle your microphone as well. 

You can visit Wandy at www.dearwandy.com

KUNG-FU FIGHTING

I've got a tip for anyone who likes playing *Shogun*. Get hold of a copy of *Kung Fu Fighting* by Carl Douglas and rip it to a .WAV audio file on your hard drive. Then, make three copies of it. Name these copies "battle 1", "battle 2", and "battle 3". Next, browse to your Sounds\Music folder within the Shogun hierarchy and move the existing three files someplace else. Move in your copies. Now, when your troops start fighting each other, the game will play everyone's favourite novelty disco smash. It certainly keeps me amused when 10,000 of my men are running round the map after a single archer. Enjoy!

Luke

Wandy says: Proof that winning tips don't need to be complex or hardcore. They just need to have a technical flavour. This one made me spit tea into my keyboard, and for that alone Luke gets his nifty. By the way, if you want to rip a CD audio track to WAV or MP3, try CDex from www.cdex.n3.net. And if you want to rip an existing MP3 to WAV, you can do it with Winamp. Press CTRL+P and highlight Nullsoft Disk Writer from the Output Plug-ins section. Press the Configure button and choose an output directory. Next time you play a tune, a WAV copy will appear at the location you specified.



One, two, do the Kung Fu



WATCHDOG

It's never pleasant being on the receiving end of poor service. That's why we're here – it's payback time...

■ **WRITING WRONGS** Adam Phillips

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

Don't worry – we're here to help when you've reached the end of your tether. If you have a consumer issue that needs addressing then drop us a line.

WRITE TO Watchdog, PC ZONE, Dennis Publishing, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1T 4JD

EMAIL Alternatively, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject heading 'Watchdog'

READ ME!

If you are writing in to complain about a product, please supply us with your full name, address and **contact number**. With PCs, make sure that you also include all **purchasing details** such as reference and invoice numbers.

"The service is not an 'always on' service and is not designed for unlimited use"

BT EXPLAINS THEIR MEANING OF 'ANYTIME'

THE ACCUSED

dabs
com

freemove

BTopenworld

ebuyer

ntl:

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

"E-BUYER ACTUALLY RESPONDS" SHOCKA!

We thought it would never happen. We thought they didn't care. As regular readers will remember, E-Buyer's customer service is seemingly so piss poor that on two previous occasions when we raised reader complaints with them, they didn't even bother getting back to us with an official response. But not anymore.

Step forward Rob who turned to us out of sheer desperation after E-Buyer made several mistakes over a DVD and modem he ordered. "The DVD has now been sent, but the modem was to follow with another order," explains Rob. "My current order has been awaiting dispatch for three days now, which means more phone calls at my expense – and they haven't replied to my e-notes! What can I do?"

E-Buyer actually got back to us and offered the following: "We made a couple of 'human' mistakes with an order, so a couple of items were missed off the order, which were duly dispatched to our customer. To make amends for the late delivery of the order, we upgraded this to a Saturday delivery at no extra cost to Mr Hember, which was a fair and reasonable gesture on our part."

They accept at the moment that their service level is below par and they also claim that they have brought in extra resources and refined some of their internal processes to enable them to resolve



It's hell trying to get through to E-Buyer.

problems before they occur. We shall see...

NTL MIA?

DGNR8 (we'll call him 'Bob') heard that NTL had started a new broadband service. When Bob rang up NTL and enquired about it he was told that he could receive broadband even if he was on NTL's analogue service. Trouble is, when he went on to give his details the NTL bod retracted and told him he needed to be on a digital service.

When he tried ringing back later to talk to someone else he was told he needed to be on a digital TV service. He then asked if he could get it through an already existing (but separate and unused) NTL analogue terminal in their house. "So then they gave me some rubbish about how it would disrupt the channels on the cable downstairs therefore I'd have to go on digital TV," says Bob. "Now this is garbage, as we used to have a lodger in that room, he had his own cable outlet and it was a completely separate line to the one downstairs."

Bob doesn't think there are any problem with the lines at all and wants to know whether NTL are just saying there is so that they have to install digital TV. So what does NTL have to say for themselves?

"We recently announced that customers do not need to take other services from us to receive broadband," offers a spokesperson for the company. "This is absolutely correct. We also stated clearly in our adverts that the service is subject to availability."

They say to receive broadband, a customer needs to be passed by their digital network. "Unfortunately it appears this customer is in an analogue area," NTL explains. "When we upgrade his part of the network to digital, we'll contact him offering a choice of new services, including the standalone broadband product."

They apologise for any confusion caused by their choice of words – they say you don't need to actually buy a digital TV service but have a digital service available as this supplies the broadband capabilities.

COMBI CONFUSION

It should have been simple for Steve Davies when he ordered a combi DVD/CDR unit from Dabs, "but so far I have sent 10 emails and spent one hour and 22 minutes on the phone, most of that time in a queue, and still the saga continues."

In a nutshell, Steve ordered a combined CDR and DVD drive from Dabs and they sent him a DVD-ROM instead. After contacting Dabs, they acknowledged their error and agreed to collect it "for refund and not repair", which they did a week later.

Believing that he was all set for a refund and not a replacement, Steve placed a new order and received it a few days later. "Then the next day, I had a knock on the door – it was a postman with a parcel from Dabs!" exclaims Steve. "It was a replacement drive for the unit they'd got wrong on my first order. Not only that, it was the same wrong item that they had collected less than one week ago!"

Steve sent off multiple emails asking what the hell Dabs was playing at. Finally, he got a reply, stating they would collect it. For a fee of £7.95. Oops. Anyone at Dabs care to comment?

"Mr Davies ordered a DVD/CDR," says Dabs. "However, we shipped a DVD-ROM due to a booking-in error in our warehouse. To correct this issue, we arranged to collect the incorrect product at our cost, for return to Dabs. We also arranged for a replacement DVD/CDR to be shipped on receipt of the returned item."

Unfortunately, the same incorrect item was subsequently re-sent as the



Postman Pat arrived with yet another incorrect order from Dabs...

booking-in error was only discovered afterwards. "In the meantime, and before the return and replacement process was completed, Mr Davies placed a new order via our website, which, as order processing at Dabs is completely automated, was duly shipped. This explains why Mr Davies received two units," explains the company.

They apologise for any inconvenience caused by their error and are more than happy to provide Mr Davies with the correct DVD/CDR he ordered. "A collection and replacement will be arranged at our expense," claims Dabs.

BANDWIDTH BLOCKER?

You've seen the ads. You've heard the claims. Surf anytime you like, for as long as you like. Which sounded like a good idea to Mr Brown: "When I first signed up for BT Anytime, it was 24/7 hence the name Anytime," he recalls. "Some time ago they emailed me and said I was using my account too much and that I was breaking their new Terms and Conditions, which was 12 hours a day."

BT told Brown they wanted to reduce this further, to five hours a day – that's five each day over a month, which equals 150 hours. "How can they just change the Terms and Conditions when they feel like it?" ponders Brown. "The truth is I work on the Internet and need to be connected for hours at a time – this is why I went with the original 24/7 Anytime package in the first place..."

"From November 1, 2002, the Anytime connection limit will be amended from 12 hours in a 24 hour period to 150 hours a month," explains a BT

spokesperson. "Customers can carry over up to 50 unused hours from the previous month, and should they exceed the limit, will be able to continue to access their accounts via a pay-per-minute dialler. We have, in the past, made it clear that extensive use by a small number of customers has an adverse affect on the quality of service enjoyed by the majority. It sounds as if Mr Brown is in this group."

They say that they have taken action in the past to limit this effect by asking customers to modify their surfing habits. As for making changes to their service when they feel like it, BT explains. "The service is not an 'always on' service and is not designed for unlimited use. If customers require an 'always on' style service,

angry the line failed," explains Rob. "I'm angry that Freeserve continued to process our order after the line failed its test."

Freeserve says this is an isolated incident and that they offer their sincerest apologies for the cock-up. They will be contacting Rob ASAP to sort out the matter.

BUYERS BEWARE?

Reader Martin Richardson brought a NEC monitor from Global Computer Systems because, although it wasn't the cheapest, it came with a good warranty.

A few weeks later the monitor started playing up and Martin emailed Global Computers with his problem. There was no response so he tried phoning. When he finally got through he was told that all NEC warranty claims were made through NEC. Martin called NEC who said they couldn't find the monitor on their database. The next day he was told that the monitor was in fact a Packard Bell and he'd need to phone France for support. After five days of listening to standby 'muzak' he was told that the monitor should have been sold as a package with a computer and therefore he wasn't entitled to a warranty claim.

GCS said they'd sort the problem and Martin was told their supplier had provided a replacement as a 'favour'. When he picked it up he was told that if anything went wrong with the monitor then he wasn't to come back to GCS but to contact NEC instead. Needless to say, the replacement is playing up, leaving Martin unsure of who to turn to.

Regarding the failure of your second monitor, Martin, GCS says you haven't been in touch about it, "therefore we are in a position where we obviously couldn't have offered a solution," explains GCS. "With regards to this matter, I would like him to contact us so that we can resolve his problems. We have already contacted our suppliers and are currently attempting to obtain a replacement monitor."

So, fingers crossed, third time lucky, eh Martin? In the meantime, GCS haven't addressed the allegation that the monitor provided shouldn't be sold separately from Packard Bell's packages. **[P2]**



Mr Brown continues his frustrating search through BT's Terms and Conditions

there are other products more suited to their needs." Maybe you should start looking for a different provider Mr Brown.

FREESERVE FREEFALL

Keen to join the bandwagon that is broadband Internet, Rob Wilson took the plunge with Freeserve. All seemed well – the engineer turned up to check the line and two days later, the modem arrived.

"At this point, we obviously assumed that the line had passed the test and that everything was going ahead," explains Rob. But then they waited and waited for the line to become active. During this time, they paid for the £85 modem and were charged £29.99 for their first month for a service they couldn't use. Rob was eventually told by Freeserve that his line had failed the line test. "I'm not

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Age of Empire 2: Conq	Duke Nukem 3D	Lin'it Up	Soldier of Fortune
Age of Emp: R. of Rome	Duke Nukem: Manhatt.	Longest Journey	Soldier of Fortune 2
Age of Empires	Dune 2000	Lord of Rings: F. of Ring	Spiderman
Age of Empires 2	Dungeon Keeper	Lost Empire of Atlantis	Spiderman The Movie
Age of Wonder	Dungeon Keeper 2	M = 13	Sports Car GT
Age of Wonders 2	Dungeon Siege	Mafia	Star Trek: Away Team
Airport Inc	E = 05	Mall Tycoon	Star Trek: Elite Force
Airport Tycoon	Earth 2150	Martian Gothic	Star Trek: Empires at War
Alien vs Predator	Earthworm Jim 1	Master of Olympus	Star Wars: Clone Camp
Alien vs Predator 2	Elder Scr. III: Morrowind	Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX	Star Wars: Gal. B'grounds
Alliances (I. Galactica 2)	Elder Scrolls	Max Payne	Star Wars: Jedi Knight
Anachronox	Emperor Battle for Dune	Mech Commander	Star Wars: Jedi Knight 2
Anno 1602	Emperor Middle Kingd.	Medal of Honor: All. Ass	Star Wars: Phantom M
Army Men	Empire Earth	Medieval: Total War	Stronghold
Army Men RTS	Europa Universalis	Metal Gear Solid	Sudden Strike 2
Army Men: World War	European Wars, Cossaks	Microsoft Flight Sim '00	Summoner
Atlantis	F = 06	Midtown Madness	Swat 3
Atlantis 3: New World	FA Plague Fball Man '02	Midtown Madness 2	T = 20
AVP 2: Primal Hunt	Falcon 4.0	Might & Magic 7	Tactical Ops: Ass. Terror
B = 02	Fallout 2	Mobile Forces	The Thing
Baldur's G.: Sword Coast	Fate of the Dragon	Monopoly	The Hospital
Baldur's G. 2: Sh. of Arn	Fellowship Of The Ring	Monopoly Tycoon	Theme Park Inc
Battlefield 1942	FIFA 2000	Moon Project	Theme Park World
Beach Life	FIFA 2001	Morrowind	Thief 2: Metal Age
Beavis & Butthead	FIFA 2002	Moto Racer 3	Thief: Dark Project
Big Game Hunter 2	FIFA 2003	Motocross Madness	TOCA Touring Cars 2
Black & White	FIFA 96	Mummy	Tomb Raider
Black & White: Cr. Isle	FIFA 97	Myst	Tomb Raider 2
Blood Omen 2	FIFA 98	N = 14	Tomb Raider 3
Brian Lara Cricket	FIFA 99	Nakatomi Plaza	Tomb Raider 4
Broken Sword	Fifa World Cup 2002	Need 4 Speed 2	Tomb Raider 5
Broken Sword 2	Final Fantasy 7	Need 4 Speed 4	Tony Hawk's 2
C = 03	Final Fantasy 8	Need 4 Speed 5 Porsche	Total Annihilation
C&C: Firestorm	Flight Sim 98	Neopets	Total Club Man. 2003
C&C: Red Alert	Flight Unlimited 2	Neverwinter Nights	Traffic Giant
C&C: Red Alert 2	Formula 1 2000	Nine One One F&Rescue	Tropica
C&C: Red Alert 2 Y's Rev.	Freedom Force	No One Lives Forever 2	Ultimate Soccer Man. 98
C&C: Renegade	Frontline Attack	Nomad Soul	Unreal
C&C: Tiberian Sun	G = 07	Nax	Unreal Tournament
C. Wolfenstein: Return to	Galactic Battlegrounds	O = 15	Unreal Tournament 2003
Caesar 3	Gangsters	Op. Flashpoint Resist.	V = 22
Capitalism	Gangsters 2	Operation Flashpoint	Vampire: Masq. Red
Carmageddon	Ghost Recon	Original War	V-Rally
Carmageddon 2	Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Outpost 2	W = 23
Carmageddon TDR 2000	Global Operations	P = 16	War Over Europe
Casino Tycoon	Grand Prix 3	Pharaoh	Warcraft 3: R. of Chaos
Chamber of Secrets	Grand Theft Auto	Pharaoh: Cleopatra	Warlords Battlecry 1 & 2
Champ. Manager 2000	Grand Theft Auto 2	Pizza Connection 2	Worms
Champ. Manager '01	GTA: London 1969	Planescape Torment	Worms Armageddon
Champ. Manager 97	Gunman Chronicles	Pokémon Trading Card	Worms World Party
Champ. Manager 98	H = 08	Populous the Beginning	WWE Raw
Champ. Manager 99	Half Life	Premier Manager 98	Y = 25
Champ. Manager 2	Half Life: Blue Shift	Premier Manager 99	Yuri's Revenge
Chasm: The Rift	Half Life: Counterstrike	Primal Hunt (AVP2)	Z = 26
Civilization	Half Life: Opp. Force	Project IGI	Zeus: Master of Olympus
Civilization 3	Harry Potter	Q = 17	Zoo Tycoon
Colin McRae Rally 2	Harry Potter C. of Secrets	Quake	Zoo Tycoon: Marine M.
Colonization	Heist	Quake 3	Plus Many More...
Comanche 4	Hercules	R = 18	
Command & Conquer	Heroes of M&M III	Railroad Tycoon 2	
Commandos 2	Heroes of M. & Magic 4	Rally Champ. Ext.	
Commandos B E Lines	Hidden & Dangerous	Rayman 2	
Conflict Zone	Hitman	RC Tycoon CS Follies	
Conflict: Desert Storm	Hitman 2: Silent Ass.	Red Alert (C&C)	
Conquest Frontier Wars	Hogs of War	Red Alert 2	
Constructor	Holiday Island	Red Faction	
Corporate Machine	Home-world	Renegade	
Cossacks: The Art of War	Hoagilans: Storm Europe	Return to C. Wolfenstein	
Cossacks: European Wars	Hoyle's Casino 2001	Road Rash	
Counterstrike (Half Life)	I = 09	Robot Wars	
Crazy Taxi	I.G.I. (Project)	Roll Cage 2	
Cricket 2002	IL2 Sturmovik	Roller Coaster Tycoon	
Crusaders of M&M	Immortal Sovereigns	RollerCoaster Tycoon II	
Curse of Monkey Island	Imperium Galactica	Rugby 2001	
Cuthroats	Imperium Galactica 2	Rune	
D = 04	Independence War	Runescape	
Dark Forces 2	Industry Giant 2	S = 19	
Dark Reign 2	Interstate 76	S. Wars: Force Comm	
Death Trap Dungeon	Italian Job	Seadogs	
Delta Force	J = 10	Secret Service	
Delta Force 2	Jazz Jackrabbit 2	Septerra Core	
Delta Force: Land Warr.	Jedi Knight 2	Serious Sam	
Delta Force: T. F. Dagger	Jimmy White's 2: Cueball	Settlers 3	
Desperados	Jurassic Park	Settlers 4	
Destruction Derby	K = 11	Severance: B. of Dark.	
Deus-Ex	Kingdom Under Fire	Shogun: Total War	
Diablo	Kingspin	Silent Assassin	
Diablo 2	Kings Quest 8	Sim City 2000	
Die Hard Nakat. Plaza	L = 12	Sim City 3000	
Disc World 2	Large Winch	Sim Golf	
Discworld Noir	Last Sanctuary	Sims	
Divine Divinity	Le Mans 24 Hours	Sims Hot Date	
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Dragon Throne	Lego Island 2	Sims Livin' It Up	

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We've performed massive surgery on our Buyer's Guide to give you an even clearer picture of what makes up the dream games machine. We've got three categories for each component, giving you the Best Performer, the Best Buy and the Best Budget. If you think we've got something wrong, email us at letters@pczone.co.uk, and if we print your suggestion we'll give you a GeForce FX card from Gainward

◀ BEST PERFORMANCE ▶

◀ BEST BUY ▶

◀ BEST BUDGET ▶

INTEL MOTHERBOARD



P4T-533C
STREET PRICE £136
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

Following the success of its Intel-850-based P4T, ASUS release a revision based on the i850e chipset for the new 533MHz FSB Pentium 4s. With support for PC1066 RAMBUS and AGP4x, the P4T-533 manages to stand head and shoulders above the competition thanks to clever board design and high-quality components. If you have to have the best then you have to have this.



845E MAX2-BLR
STREET PRICE £117.50
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

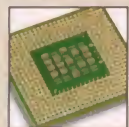
The Max2-BLR from MSI is one of the most rounded Intel 845E packages we've seen. Based on the newest revision of the DDR-supporting chipset for the latest 533MHz FSB chips, MSI has brought in some clever extras including onboard 5.1 sound. The addition of Bluetooth allows wireless connectivity to enabled gadgets, plus readiness for a range of peripherals.



GA-8IEX
STREET PRICE £91.64
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

Just because you're working to a tight budget, don't think you have to settle for second best. If you're after an entry-level Pentium 4 then you could do worse than check out the excellent GA-8IEX from Gigabyte. Along with support for the new 500MHz FSB chips and DDR memories comes integrated Creative 5.1 sound and 10/100 network plus six USB2.0. For under £100 you can't do better.

INTEL PROCESSOR



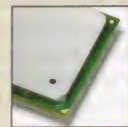
PENTIUM 4 3.06GHZ (WITH HYPERTHREADING)
STREET PRICE £574.57
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

As the first CPU to break the 3Ghz barrier we knew this 3066Mhz chip from Intel was going to be fast. Incorporating a new technology known as 'Hyperthreading' these new CPUs are capable of running like a dual-processor set-up, taking multitasking performance and responsiveness to new levels.



PENTIUM 4 'A' 2GHZ
STREET PRICE £153.92
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

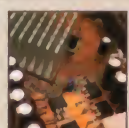
Pentium 4 'A' (or the 'Northwood' core as it is known) has doubled the cache of the previous-generation chips. Based on a 400Mhz bus, the 2Ghz chip is compatible with any of the i845e/i850e motherboards and would be more than respectable in any gaming system. Look at the price difference between this and the top-end Intel chip on the left. Frightening isn't it?



CELERON 1.8GHZ
STREET PRICE £65
MANUFACTURER Intel
TELEPHONE 01793 403 000
WEBSITE www.intel.co.uk

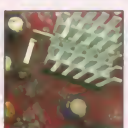
With one quarter the cache of the newest Pentium 4s, the Celeron 1800Mhz may not seem like it's got the necessary guts for a decent gaming system but nothing could be further from the truth. At entry level these chips are a cost-effective way of getting an i845e/i850e system together, which can be upgraded to P4 later simply by swapping chips. It's a brilliant compromise solution.

AMD MOTHERBOARD



ASUS A7N8X
STREET PRICE £128
MANUFACTURER ASUS
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.asus.com

It's been a long time coming but everything good is worth the wait and finally we've got our hands on the nForce 2 in the form of the A7N8X from ASUS. Bringing everything NVIDIA have promised including DualDDR DDR400, AGP8X, dual LAN, Firewire, USB2.0 and other added goodies such as Serial-ATA, this new board sits numero uno thanks to an excellent feature set and blistering performance.



K7N420PRO
STREET PRICE £83.42
MANUFACTURER Microstar International
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688
WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

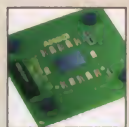
As the top nForce board, the K7N420Pro from MSI beat every KT266/266A offering we put it against. Add to the great performance an integrated GeForce2MX graphics chip plus separate AGP 4x slot, 100Mbit LAN, integrated 5.1 sound, and you'll agree it's perfect for seasoned enthusiasts and first-time gamers alike. Watch out for the nForce 2 boards, arriving next month though.



GA-7TXH
STREET PRICE £83
MANUFACTURER Gigabyte
TELEPHONE 01908 362 700
WEBSITE www.gbt-tech.co.uk

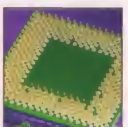
Usurps another great Gigabyte board - this one is a fantastic Via KT266A-based DDR solution. Integrated are both 10/100 LAN and four-channel audio from Creative, which is plenty good enough for gamers. In testing it proved stable and among the faster DDR266 boards for Athlon. A complete bargain if you're looking to build a cheap system around an AMD processor.

AMD PROCESSOR



ATHLONXP 2700+
STREET PRICE £296.09
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

While they may not come top of the pile for sheer number crunching with the AthlonXP just yet, AMD are making some substantial steps in that direction - as the new 2700+ CPU holds testament. Based on a ramped-up 166Mhz front-side bus, these new CPUs are over 10 per cent quicker at the same frequencies. It may lack the fancy Hyperthreading of the new Pentium 4 but then it costs about half as much.



ATHLONXP 2100+
STREET PRICE £90
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Running at 1.8Ghz, the 2100+ AthlonXP is the quickest of AMD's original AthlonXP chips. Boasting both Quantispeed and 3DNow! Architectures plus fast cache and a 266Mhz bus speed, most existing Athlon motherboards will support it out of the box. In terms of bang for your buck this provides the best middle-ground solution for gaming that money can buy.



ATHLONXP 1800+
STREET PRICE £61
MANUFACTURER AMD
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.amd.com/gb-uk

Low-end Pentium 4s and AthlonXPs are now getting so cheap they rival the Durons and Celerons of this world - and that's exactly what we have here. AMD has traditionally been the cheaper of the two processor giants, and the AthlonXP 1800+ (top-end equipment not so long ago), has taken such a plunge in price it's within £5 of the old Best Budget chip, the Duron 1.3Ghz. Bargain.

HARD DRIVE



WD1200JB 120GB
STREET PRICE £157.44
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
TELEPHONE N/A
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

With your game and media collections growing every day - some game installs use over 2Gb of your precious storage - what you need is a really big, fast hard drive and that's exactly what Western Digital deliver with the WD1200JB. 8Mb of cache and spin speeds of 7200RPM mean that this 120Gb beast thrashes all competition beating a large proportion of SCSI drives too.



BARRACUDA ATA IV 60GB
STREET PRICE £79.89
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

An old favourite at PC ZONE, the Barracuda ATA IV is packed full of clever technology, which allows this 60Gb beastie to spin at the heady heights of 7,200RPM while sounding much less obtrusive than many 5,400RPM units. Don't underestimate the difference this can make. If you're still struggling with space this could well be worth a dip.



U SERIES 6 40GB
STREET PRICE £63
MANUFACTURER Seagate
TELEPHONE 01628 890 366
WEBSITE www.seagate.com

The U Series 5 drives are now pretty much unavailable, and find themselves replaced in the hallowed PC ZONE Buyer's Guide pages by its younger brother the Series 6. With the same specs as the Series 5 these new drives run even quieter and cooler than before, and provide what must be considered the minimum amount of storage space for any self-respecting gaming system.

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www.gainward.net



BEST PERFORMANCE	BEST BUY	BEST BUDGET
 <p>PX-W4012TA STREET PRICE £78 MANUFACTURER Plexor TELEPHONE +32 2 725 5522 WEBSITE www.plexor.be A decent CD-rewriter provides a flexible storage solution, and most of the problems associated with the technology have been eradicated with this drive. If CD burning times of over five minutes won't do then look no further than the PX-W4012TA from Plexor. Cutting CDs in around two minutes this 40x leviathan has a full range of countermeasures including Burn-Proof to make coasters a thing of the past.</p>	 <p>CRW3200E-VK STREET PRICE £86.94 MANUFACTURER Yamaha TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.yamaha-europe.com It might not be as fast as the Plexor drive but this is still a superb buy. Yamaha has consistently been praised for making great long-lasting CD-RW drives, and the 3200 is the companies' current range-topper. The overall bundle is excellent but we particularly love its Audiomaster burning mode for cutting high-quality audio CDs – and we're sure you will too. A veritable bargain if ever we saw one.</p>	 <p>40X12X48 CDRW STREET PRICE £45.82 MANUFACTURER LiteOn TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.liteonit.com The LiteOn 40x12x48 offers stunning value for money, costing slightly more than many standard CD-ROM drives. While maybe not as feature-packed as the Plexor and Yamaha it does have a few tricks up its sleeve, including Smart-Burn – a technology which assesses media quality and adjusts burn speeds to reduce coaster ratio. The best low-cost drive that money can buy.</p>
 <p>SAPPHIRE ATLANTIS RADEON 9700 STREET PRICE £290 MANUFACTURER Sapphire TELEPHONE 020 8979 6407 WEBSITE www.sapphiretech.com We thought it would be months before we'd see boards based on the Radeon 9700 Pro dipping below £300, but Sapphire obviously had other ideas. Delivering the same high framerates as the Hercules card previously listed the Sapphire is around £60 cheaper missing only the cosmetic memory cooling.</p>	 <p>VERTO TI4200 64MB STREET PRICE £124.54 MANUFACTURER PNY TELEPHONE 01256 338 609 WEBSITE www.pny-europe.com/uk The Verto Ti4200 64Mb GeForce4 from PNY is a relatively late arrival. Coming within 20 per cent of Ti4600 in many benchmarks, but costing up to half the price, it has all of the features of the quicker GPU without the associated dent in your wallet. Overall, we think this is the best solution if you're looking to future-proof your system without spending a ridiculous amount of cash along the way.</p>	 <p>EXCALIBUR RADEON 9000 PRO STREET PRICE £83 MANUFACTURER HiTech TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.hitech.com.hk The Excalibur Radeon 9000 Pro may not be the fastest DirectX8.1 board but it's certainly the cheapest. Coming in at well under the price of the equivalent Hercules board, it sports ATI's new mainstream GPU and 64Mb of 275MHz DDR (500MHz). This HiTech board is a great step-up to playing shader-dominated games for the budget-conscious.</p>
 <p>SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY PLATINUM/EX STREET PRICE £162 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com Successor to the Sound Blaster Level series, the newer Sound Blaster Audigy brings with it a pile of new toys including EAX advanced HD and on-board Firewire. The Platinum/EX card comes with an external breakout box which moves all the important ports and connectors of the Platinum onto your desk.</p>	 <p>AUDIGY2 STREET PRICE £88 MANUFACTURER Creative Labs TELEPHONE N/A WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com The original Sound Blaster Audigy sat in this slot from the day it arrived, only to be replaced by it's next of kin, Audigy2. Delivering further improved audio quality, though this time over 6.1 channels of Dolby Digital EX, Audigy2 is the first soundcard to receive THX certification and deliver the fidelity required to reproduce new formats such as DVD-Audio. Pound-for-pound it's the best gaming soundcard in the world.</p>	 <p>GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II DIGITAL EDITION STREET PRICE £37.50 MANUFACTURER Hercules TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com As a frequent offender on the PC ZONE Buyer's Guide, the Fortissimo II lived in the Best Bargain slot for many months – only to be replaced by its doppelgänger the Fortissimo II Digital Edition – which adds 5.1 for your DVDs and an even better software bundle.</p>
 <p>INTELLIMOUSE EXPLORER V3.0 STREET PRICE £37 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.co.uk Probably the cheapest upgrade you can perform, but if you're playing with a rubbish mouse it could give you the biggest performance increases. Hardcore gamers love the IntelliMouse Explorer v3.0, and we have to agree that it's the best ball-less rodent out there. With improved optical sensors, a better shape and even more responsive buttons it's in a word – fragtastic.</p>	 <p>MX500 STREET PRICE £32 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com Microsoft might dominate the mouse market but it hasn't got everything its own way. The MX500 is one of the most interesting mice we've seen for a while now. The left and right buttons are hidden – being integrated into the upper shell of the body and on top of the fourth and fifth buttons. There are two either side of the wheel to assist scrolling, plus one that emulates Alt-Tab. Very handy.</p>	 <p>OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE STREET PRICE £25.84 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.co.uk For gamers who don't need five buttons and a portable back-scratcher on their mice, we present the Optical Mouse Blue. With all of the high-tech optical wizardry of the other Microsoft mice, this funky blue three-buttoned offering is extremely comfortable to use and is perfect for RPG/RTS titles – or FPS-ers who prefer to keep most of their controls on the keyboard.</p>
 <p>PRO KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £52.87 MANUFACTURER Apple TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010 WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk While it may seem odd to have a Mac product amongst all this PC goodness we have good reason. Rather than fall around with 15 multifunction buttons which don't help at all in fast-paced gaming, the Pro Keyboard from Apple is simply the best USB offering out there. Quality components make it one of the most quiet and compact offerings money can buy. You get what you pay for, remember.</p>	 <p>OFFICE KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £28.19 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk Microsoft's office keyboard may seem more focused at the professional market with the MSOffice buttons across the top, but we found the scroll wheel and remappable keys brilliant in many games – in some situations acting like an additional mouse wheel, one for weapons, the other for items. Handy shortcuts abound and brilliant all-round performance make this our new Best Buy.</p>	 <p>MULTIMEDIA KEYBOARD STREET PRICE £21.14 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk The Multimedia Keyboard can only be described as the geek's friend. With support for many of the Windows XP customisations plus dedicated buttons for the instant messenger app of your choice and a central console of buttons to drive media player, life doesn't get much simpler, and, at under £25, not much cheaper either. If you're struggling with a poor keyboard give the pub a miss for one night and get this.</p>
 <p>WINGMAN CORDLESS STREET PRICE £34.07 MANUFACTURER Logitech TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127 WEBSITE www.logitech.com The PC might not have a definitive gamepad just yet, but this is as close as it gets for the moment. The infra-red interface doesn't hinder your input. On the contrary, the fact it's wireless means your desktop is less cluttered and the discreet receiver is almost invisible. Comfortable to use and a doddle to set up, it makes the grade as best performance but only by a short distance.</p>	 <p>FIRESTORM DUAL-POWER GAMEPAD STREET PRICE £24.99 MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881 WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk This wired, force-feedback version of the Firestorm wireless might not win any awards for looks, but its ergonomics are great. Decent soft grips with superbly placed buttons and a decent d-pad make precision control a breeze. Set-up couldn't be simpler and the rumble ain't bad either. A no-nonsense pad for no-nonsense gamers.</p>	 <p>SIDEWINDER PLUG 'N' PLAY STREET PRICE £12.92 MANUFACTURER Microsoft TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100 WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder Four buttons, two triggers, directional pad, USB. Dead simple, dead effective and at under £13 really rather cheap. The Plug 'n' Play gamepad is the new basic controller from the Seattle sidewinders and comes in funky transparent plastic, in contrast to the gloomy black pads of yesteryear. We've used them in the office for years and we've never heard a word against them.</p>

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JOYSTICK



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249

MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

Have we finally snapped? £249 for a joystick? You could get a brand new GeForce 4 for that and still have enough change to go out on the razz for a couple of weeks. Ah, but the HOTAS is probably the finest flight stick in the world, complete with tome-like manual. For those that have everything this is the closest you'll get to sitting in a plane... If you're strong enough to lift it out of the box.



SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2

STREET PRICE £52.87

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

The Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 is a fine stick with perhaps the best, most refined force-feedback settings around. Performance is great overall, with the infra-red activation sensors in the handle. Its huge base will keep it planted on your desk and as long as you don't mind the extra wiring for the external power supply, it makes a great enhancement for any airborne frolics.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

STREET PRICE £30

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451 900

WEBSITE www.saitek.co.uk

Saitek's current generation of sticks are fabulous. The Cyborg Gold is a top-line, former Best Buy, USB stick that excels across the board. The design is superb, both durable and adjustable – even the left-handed are catered for with response and accuracy both unequalled. If you're not interested in force-feedback effects (and to be honest who is these days?) this is the stick to go for.

SPEAKERS



MEGAWORKS 510D

STREET PRICE £299.62

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.uk.europe.creative.com

The Megaworks 510D is the Daddy of gaming speakers – five 70W satellites and one 150W digitally amplified subwoofer together deliver 500W of power to recreate subtle sounds and devastating explosions alike. Want to know how those soldiers on Omaha Beach in *Medal Of Honour* really felt? Now's your chance. Just make sure your neighbours are away first.



PROMEDIA 4.1

STREET PRICE £299

MANUFACTURER Klipsch

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.klipsch.com

Klipsch's Promedia 4.1 took Best Buy many months ago with their TXH-Approval and great sound reproduction. They're beautifully made, sound amazing and are the first speakers to split your ears as well as the Crossfires from VideoLogic did. Whether you're a gamer or an audiophile looking for your PC to make sweet music, these are the business, as long as you can find an outlet willing to serve them up.



XPS210

STREET PRICE £40

MANUFACTURER Hercules

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.hercules-uk.com

Who needs surround sound? Answer: everyone who can afford it. For everyone else, this small but perfectly formed 2.1 speaker set-up is cheap – but doesn't sound it. With tone controls and stereo enhancement, it's an ideal solution for desktop gaming. The satellites and subwoofer are well matched, giving decent overall sound. And adorned in royal blue it looks the part too...

HEADPHONES



HD600

STREET PRICE £200

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

The HD600 are Audiophile-level headphones, and unless used with a soundcard like the Audigy Platinum/EX are total overkill for most gamers. That doesn't stop their fantastic response range from reproducing every gunshot and explosion perfectly with bass so deep and strong you'll be convinced your speakers are running too. They won't obviously – you'll have sold them to finance these.



HD497

STREET PRICE £47

MANUFACTURER Sennheiser

TELEPHONE 01494 551 551

WEBSITE www.sennheiser.co.uk

Replacing the HD200 Masters – which used to occupy our Best Buy slot comes the HD497 – also from Sennheiser. These new headphones have an enhanced frequency response range which might not come close to the HD600, but is still pretty damn good. Their extremely comfortable design coupled with easily replaceable parts, mean these headphones could well outlast your PC.



GAMEVOICE USB

STREET PRICE £34.07

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com

When are headphones more than just headphones? Simple – when they're the Microsoft Gamevoice USB. The Gamevoice allows you to talk to your mates online as you play clan games with a handy control panel which lets you switch between comms channels. Adding a new dimension to your gaming online, and doubling as a decent set of headphones they're a bit of a bargain.

TFT



180MT

STREET PRICE £1,100

MANUFACTURER Philips

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.philips.co.uk

The 180MT from Philips is more than just a flat panel. An 18-inch fourth-generation screen with VGA connectivity plus inputs for Scart, S-Video and an RF tuner mean that you can ditch you telly and pipe all manner of consoles, TV and video kit through the one screen. You can even use picture-in-picture to watch the latest *Futurama* while you die repeatedly in *BF1942*. Classic.



SYNCMASTER 181T

STREET PRICE £599

MANUFACTURER Samsung

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.samsung.com

What do you need to be heralded as our Best Buy in the TFT category? You need to boast top specs, which the 181T provides with a response time of 25ms, a contrast ratio of 500:1 and rated brightness of 250 cd/m2. This results in a cleaner, crisper picture than our previous award-winner. A good start but the 181T is also cheaper and bigger (a whole inch diagonally) which completes the perfect package.



T1620B

STREET PRICE £522.87

MANUFACTURER Sharp

TELEPHONE 0800 262 958

WEBSITE www.sharp.co.uk

Sharper than the iyma and delivers all the visual goodies albeit on a smaller display area. Delivering 1280 x 1024 on a digital 75Hz, this screen will make your games look great while allowing you to reclaim some desktop real estate from large lumbering CRTs. If TFTs aren't quite affordable yet, this proves that the day isn't far away.

MONITOR



GDM-FW900

STREET PRICE £1,139

MANUFACTURER Sony

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.sony.co.uk

Do you remember the day when PCs used to ship with 14-inch screens? Pah. The gigantic 24-inch GDM-FW900 from Sony has to be seen to be believed. Costing almost double that of the iyma Vision Master Pro 512, you'd expect something special and that's exactly what you get. Supporting nutty resolutions such as 2304x1440 at 80Hz, you can be sure this ultra-flat screen will deliver a rock-solid picture at all times.



VISION MASTER PRO 512

STREET PRICE £585.15

MANUFACTURER Iiyama

TELEPHONE 01438 745 482

WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Equipped with the latest Mitsubishi aperture grille Diamondtron screen, it has a rather smaller viewable area than suggested – 20 inches instead of 22, but gives outstanding results at resolutions up to 2048x1536 at 85Hz – something many graphics cards can't even support. There's also a four-port USB hub and integrated speakers which are OK for Windows use, but may be slightly tinny for games or music.



720P 17-INCH CRT

STREET PRICE £116.32

MANUFACTURER Hansol

TELEPHONE 01252 360 400

WEBSITE www.hansol-uk.com

For the budget-conscious gamer Hansol is a company well worth a look. With a fabulously low price, it does 1280x1024 at an excellent 85Hz (and for those mad enough, 1600x1200 at 75Hz). Focus is tight and the picture sharp, and considering you're paying a little over £100 there's not a lot that will touch this for the money. If you've still got a 15in monitor, consider yourself rebuked.

MP3 PLAYER



APPLE IPOD

STREET PRICE £399 inc VAT

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000

WEBSITE www.apple.com/ipod

With all of the styling of their desktop systems, the iPod caused a few dropped jaws for looks alone. Packing a 20Gb hard disk and speedy Firewire interface, the new models are finally Windows-compatible and come with excellent headphones and a tiny little inline remote control that means you don't have to keep fishing it out of your pocket to change tracks or up the volume.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

STREET PRICE £330 inc VAT

MANUFACTURER Archos

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. Sound is fantastic but as with a lot of other players on the market, the bundled headphones are shite.



MUVO

STREET PRICE £99.99

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP without drivers, and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.





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EXTENDED PLAY

Finishing a game is only the beginning in Extended Play. Maps, mods, add-ons and extras are all here to help you get the most out of the games you play

GETTING ON A BIT



OLD LADY Rhianna Pratchett

▲ It's not always easy to measure the passing of time. But I came to the revelation recently that this very magazine that you're holding in your sweaty hands is the 25th issue of *PC ZONE* I've worked on. I joined the team back when *Z: Steel Soldiers* graced the cover of our 99th issue and *Diablo II* was on our cover discs.

Disappointed that I was not the willing tea girl they'd hoped for, the team shipped me off to Dallas in my second week. Despite getting the flu, food poisoning and a mysterious rash, I made it back and started championing the epic strategy game *Cossacks* to the point of taking part in an all-night tournament fuelled only by *Hula Hoops* and *Pro Plus*. Oh, the folly of youth!

Now it's an older and a more jaded me that's introducing you to this latest bout of Extended Play. In case our recent *Morrowind* and *Neverwinter Nights* guides left you feeling a little beardy, we're redressing the balance with our four-page guide to creating a bombing run level using the *UT2003* editor, which you'll find on page 136. If you're getting stuck into *Age Of Mythology*, then you might like to take a brief trip down memory lane to where it all began with Richie's looking at *Age Of Empires* for Games That Changed The World. Feel that gaming love.

Warmongering

ON THE CD DVD **Medieval: Total War gets the extended play treatment**
■ www.totalwar.org ■ www.creative-assembly.co.uk



Little did they know, this was just the gatehouse...



Siege units are vital when taking on enemy headquarters.



Yellow on the battlefield? I mean, really.



Poor, defenceless banner bearers get stuffed very quickly.

IT'S ONE OF

this year's strategy success stories and has already become one of the best selling RTSs ever released on the PC – in three words it has to be *Medieval: Total War*. Like its older brother *Shogun*, *Medieval* is extremely easy to modify, with the statistics for each army created in a text file. Which is why you'll find an array of campaigns on our cover discs this month, from historically accurate European battles to all-out fictional wars for both online and single-player.

In addition to the campaigns, we also have a wallpaper pack and a fan site kit, as well as screenshots of some of the biggest battles you'll ever see, with thousands of units covering the battlefield in epic melées. As if that wasn't enough to satisfy your *Medieval* cravings, we've included panoramic shots which you can watch using a viewer on the cover discs.

We've also thrown in the latest *Shogun* patch for those still engaging in feudal Japanese warfare, together with some maps and add-ons on the discs to keep you going.

If all this gets you fired up for making your own scenarios we recommend you check out the download sections at www.totalwar.org where there's plenty of *Shogun* and *Medieval*-specific information. You'll also find an image editor on the *Total War* site, which lets you change the look of your campaigns. So go on, get editing, it's what war's good for.

CHEATS AHoy!

ON THE CD DVD The old Cheat Master section of these pages may be dead, but we haven't buried it completely. Check out our cover discs where the art of cheating is still very much alive and kicking. You can find all the latest cheats for your favourite games under CheatStation in the Extended Play section of the discs.

This month we've got everything you need to know to cheat your way through *Age Of Mythology*, *Max Payne*, *Desperados*, *Planet Of The Apes*, *The Sims* and *Front Line Attack: War Over Europe*. And in case you're in any doubt, just remember: those who can, do... those who can't, cheat. It's the only way.

136

THE GUIDE

Make your own UT 2003 levels

140

THE MODSQUAD

Parkas at the ready...

142

DISC PAGES

Check out the latest demos

146

FIGHT CLUB

Come and 'ave a go...

Unreal Rebels

ON THE DVD **A mod for UT2003 that looks as good as *Star Wars Galaxies*? Yes please**

■ www.ut2003troopers.co.uk

WITH THE mod community already swarming over the new *Unreal* engine, modders all over the world have sunk their teeth into *UT2003* (see our guide on page 136) and are already coming up with amazing maps and skins for Epic's title. Inevitably, someone always does a *Star Wars* mod and that duty has fallen to the *UT2003 Troopers* team, who are based here in the UK.

The mod will include single and multiplayer support and might be ported to the *Unreal 2* engine, depending on what it can add to the gameplay. *Troopers* will also be one of the first mods to take on board the

vehicle physics Epic provided working templates for with the initial release of *UT2003*.

One thing that might disappoint *Star Wars* fans is the absence of a lightsaber from your weapons. The development team is keen to emphasise realism, so, unlike *Jedi Knight*, there will be no lightsaber-wielding Stormtroopers and every character takes their appropriate place in the *Star Wars* universe. It looks great already, and we'll be keeping a close eye on how *Troopers* develops in the near future. In the meantime, check out the screenshot and wallpaper packs on our cover discs.



All the different Stormtrooper models are there, along with Mr Fett.



Get those walls up quick.



Fancy a little head?



I hate tinned food.

Stronghold: Crusader

■ www.fireflyworlds.com ■ stronghold.godgames.com/crusader/

ON THE DVD **IF YOU** enjoyed December's *Stronghold: Crusader* single-player demo and wanted a bit more castle building action, our discs this month have the answer with a brand new multiplayer demo fresh from the developers at Firefly. Using either the Crusader or Arabian units, you can storm enemy barricades in skirmish mode or perfect your desert warfare tactics in multiplayer with online and LAN games for two or three players.

Even if you already have the game, we've still got something to help you perk up a weary desktop with wallpaper and screenshot packs for your viewing pleasure. Man the drawbridges good people.

The Thing

■ thething.sierra.fr/en/index.html

ON THE DVD **IT'S SO** easy for developers to cock up a good film licence with a bad game – there are so many (*Planet Of The Apes* being one of the worst offenders) – and it's just as easy for filmmakers to make gaming look shallow and overly obsessed with big guns and even bigger breasts. One of the few exceptions to this rule was *The Thing* from Black Label Games, which, although not being the survival horror masterpiece it could have been, managed to at least catch some of the atmosphere of John Carpenter's classic horror film. This month we've got the latest patch for the game and a selection of wallpaper in two resolutions. Just install them, wait for a while... and see what happens.

Warcraft III

■ www.blizzard.com/support

ON THE DVD **IF YOUR** night elves are sleeping on the job and your undead are giving you lip then you'll want to get yourself the latest patch for *Warcraft III* from this month's disc sharpish. The patch includes the usual array of minor bug and gameplay fixing and lots of balances and changes, especially for the humans, undead and night elves, but there's also a smattering of tweaks for the orcs and creeps. To keep you in the *Warcraft* mood we've also included a mildly insane MP3 of the *Warcraft* characters at a Halloween party, plus more music MP3s and screenshots from the upcoming online epic *World Of Warcraft*.

SHORTS

NICE VICE



ON THE DVD It's already out on the PS2, but us PCers will have to wait until next year to get our hands on *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. Because we know you're all positively vibrating with anticipation about it, we've put a sneak look on the cover discs of this standalone semi-sequel to the game that wiped the floor at this year's Golden Joystick awards.

PATCHING AGENT 47



ON THE DVD In a surprise move for a developer, IO Interactive has released the patch for *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin* and included added support for cheats. Not only are your cheating antics supported, but you'll find bug fixes, graphical enhancements and better CD/DVD drive support. On top of this, bump-mapping is turned on so you can show off your flash graphics cards.

CITY SLICKER



ON THE DVD Continuing our *SimCity 4* coverage from last month, we've got three new in-game movies for your perusal. The movies show everything from sculpting the terrain and adding permanent features like rivers and local wildlife, to the city's detailed night mode, which has almost as many features as the day one.

WHERE WOLF?



ON THE DVD Along with the usual updates in the latest *RTGW* patch, there are features that will interest *Wolf* modders and those running servers. These include new vote flag configuration and in-game server browsers. Check out www.planetwolfenstein.com for the latest guides.

THE GUIDE: HOW TO CREATE LEVELS IN UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

It's the best-looking shooter and *Daniel Boutros* is here to help you make the best *Bombing Run* map...

WITH ITS gorgeous graphics, finely balanced weapons and sublimely fluid movement *UT2003* is definitely one of the most lavish first person shooters we've seen this year. One of the new multiplayer modes to come out of this version of *UT* was the Bombing Run, a team-based variation on Capture The Flag. Quite simply, it's like American football with guns and without the subtleties of the aforementioned US pastime.

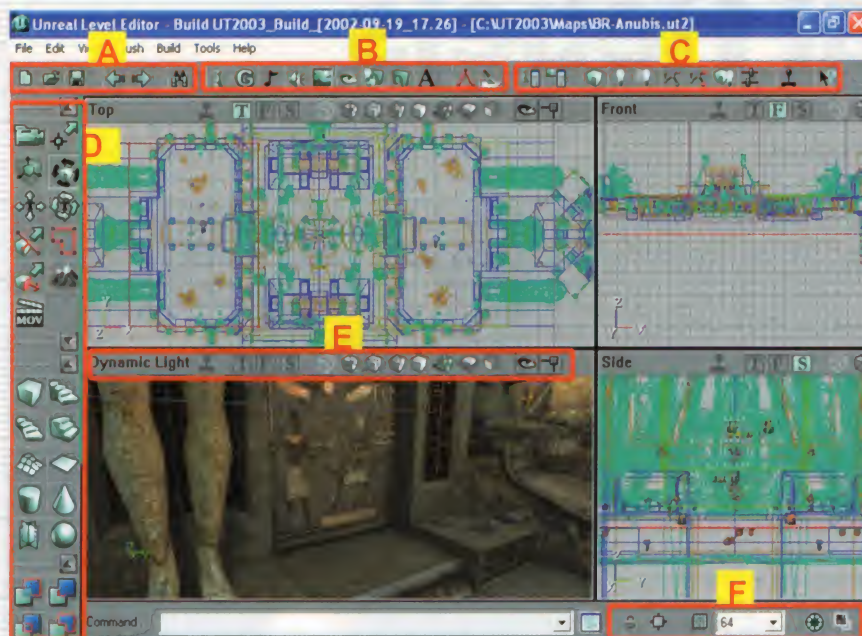
This guide will give you the core, basic and functional foundations to create your own BR levels for *UT2003*, and hopefully get you well on your way to getting a published level in the upcoming *Game of The Year* edition. It will also help you get to grips with the new editor software.

IN WITH THE NEW

Although cosmetically it looks nearly identical to previous *UT* editors, the *UT2003* editor has changed in a great many ways. For example you'll now need a plug-in to import custom textures – which you can find at the links we've included.

Also adding reflective surfaces can't be achieved by the old tick box method, as shaders and environment maps have been introduced, which although more complex, allow a vast increase in controllability for you fair aspiring designers, so don't cry just yet.

On top of that, movers are created in a completely different way, as are collision boxes. There's even a new feature, which allows particle effects like whispering fires and oozing blood, which can be accessed via emitters. I'd love to tell you about all of this and



Any one who's used 3D art packages will probably feel comfortable in the UE environment.

more, but let's get you started on the basics first.

BIG HAIRY MEN-U

The Unreal Editor (UED) interface can seem a little daunting at first, but worry not, because it's simpler than *Big Brother's Jade*. Before we begin, you can check out the beautiful main interface, above.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

Section A Basic file options and undo and redo.

Section B Browsers, script editors and the magical 2D shape editor.

Section C The build and environment buttons. Lists actors, textures, build options and the playtest button.

Section D The creation buttons. They're divided into separate sub-menus which you should take the time to explore.

Section E These are your display settings. You can choose how to view your creation, from what angle and with which textures. Groovy or what?

Section F These options are grid related. Snapping object movement, setting grid sizes etc.

This should give you some idea of what you can do in the editor. Before you start, make sure you install the update patch for the editor, again you'll find it in our Helping Hands boxout.

One more thing, UED crashes quite frequently, so instead of saying 'now save your file' every two sentences, I'll tell you now – save often and frequently, or be prepared to be consumed by rages you've never felt before. Now let's begin.

WE CAN BUILD IT PART 1: ADDING AND SUBTRACTING

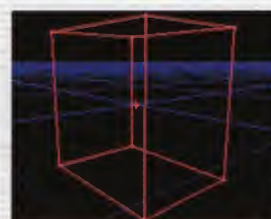
To build things in the *Unreal* universe you subtract an area from the virtual space and then add bits into it.

In layman's terms, the virtual space you begin with is like a giant lump of wood. You then 'cut' the shape of the area you want to create and then carve out the space you need inside.

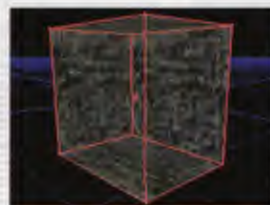
Following is a visual example. **Note:** Your textures won't look like this as I've used multiple textures to help you understand the idea behind subtracting and adding. I'll explain texturing a bit later.



Nothingness. Or rather, a giant lump of virtual wood.



You get a square brush by clicking on the cube icon in Section D of the menu.

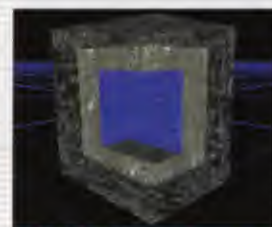


Place the brush (red highlight) where you want to subtract your space, by holding Shift and the left mouse button while moving the mouse. Press the subtract button.

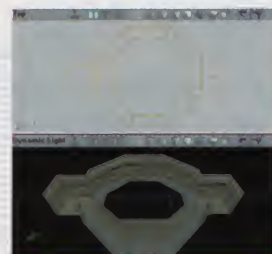


Now resize the cube brush – not the subtracted cube – by first selecting the red cube brush and then clicking Actor Scaling.

Your cursor now changes and if you hold Ctrl and either of the mouse buttons while moving the mouse, you'll notice the cube brush starts to scale in and out. Shrink the cube brush and click add. You'll notice a new cube inside the hollow cube. If you take a look in your perspective window now, you'll see yellow cubes where you added and subtracted, and a red cube where your brush is. Remember, brushes are always red and aren't part of the level. Think of them as what forms and shapes the wood.

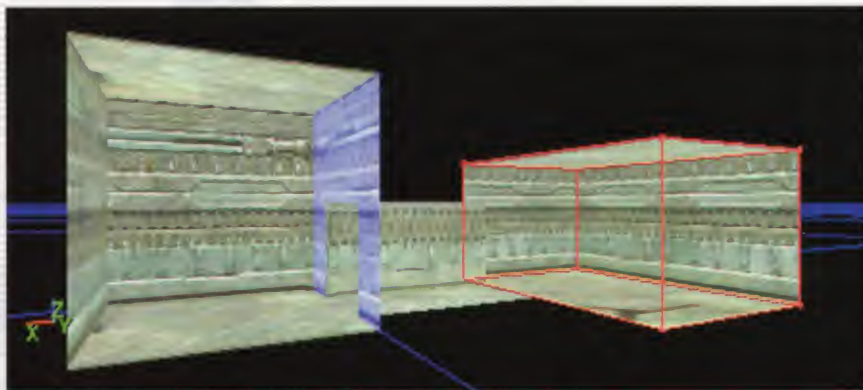


Shrink the brush cube and subtract space from the added cube. See how easy this is?



Experiment with adding and subtracting to get a feel for it. When you're happy, go to File>New and try to make this room. It's made up of two subtracted cubes and one hollow cylinder. All these objects are 256 units high. To make sure the height is correct, you can either change the grid size (Menu Section E) to 256 and measure, or simply type in the relevant size into the right-click menus for the Cube and Cylinder brushes respectively. The 'hollow' option for the cylinder can be toggled if you right-click the cylinder icon and then click create.

To create space attached to the already subtracted area, simply subtract another area outside the first area you subtracted. This is generally how room setups are created. Once you get a flair for this, you could even go for some really advanced geometry...



The traditional room – hall – room setup.



And something a little less traditional...

HIT ME SOME SKIN

Righty then. You can now build architecture, but as we all know, good texturing brings life into the duller of areas and let's face it, this level's pretty dull. You can use some of the many textures within the game, or with the addition of the DDS plugin, make up your own textures in Photoshop and import them into the editor, as long as textures match the following pixel sizes: 64, 128, 256, 512, 1024. That being said, you can have a texture that is 512 wide and 64 long.

To use the in-game textures, simply open the texture browser from Section B of the menu and go to File>Open.

Here you can pick the texture pack you want to open and browse the textures until you find what you like. For now, pick Shiptech2.

If you right-click on the object you want to texture in the perspective window and select Apply Texture x, your texture will then appear on the object. To select more than one surface, you can either shift-click the surfaces manually, or use the right-click menu and go to the Select Surfaces sub-menu.

If the texture doesn't look quite right, simply right-click again on your selected surface and look for the Alignment

menu. This has some preset texture layouts for you to try.

If you still aren't happy, experiment within the right-click menu or right-click and select your surface's properties for a detailed pop-up, which allows you to scroll and scale textures by the pixel.



If only all floors could be tiled with a simple mouse click.

Note: If you select a texture before you subtract or add an object, it will then be projected onto the object, but you can change it later if you want.

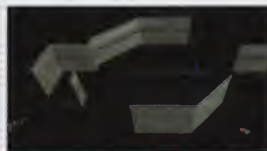
AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT...

If an old man with a beard can do it, then so can an ambitious designer with a high-spec PC. Lights can be selected either via the right-click Menu>Add Light Here, or via the Actor Class Browser – which I shall refer to as the ACB from now on – located in Menu Section B.

Open the browser, find the Light sub-heading and expand it. As you can see, you can make spotlights, sunlight and even triggered lights, which are lights that can be toggled via prescribed actions of your own design.

Pick the standard light. Click it and then right-click in your perspective window. Click Add Light Here and place it where you please. If you hold Ctrl or Shift with the left mouse button and move the mouse, you'll find the Light icon moves within the X or Y axis of the perspective window accordingly.

To see how this will look rendered in UT, go to Section C of the menu and click Build Lights. This action renders all lighting in the scenery, using the in-game engine, meaning you'll see something very close to the playable version in the perspective window.

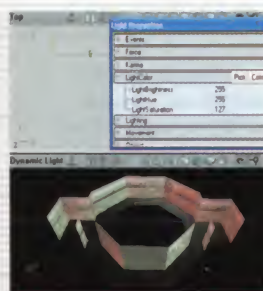


Some light entertainment...

Because you only have one light in the scene, a lot of areas remain dark. To remedy this, right-click on these areas and select Add Light Here to illuminate them. As you can see, the dark areas are lit and there are some light bulb icons in your map.

If you wish to alter the light, right-click it and select its properties. In here you can select anything from brightness, to colour and even give it a corona by attaching a texture to the Skin dropdown menu. Have a laugh – or even an almost God-like cackle – fiddling around with these.

Note: Sometimes the preview window renders the lighting inaccurately. For more realistic results, use Build All regularly when adding new lights.



Light club.

PLAYERS AND PLAYER HATERS

So now you've built a well lit, textured area. Why not move around in it and have a closer look around?

To do this you need to add a player start point. Again, we can find this in the ACB, although for now, we'll just use the right-click menu, as it's in there by default, along with a few other bits you'll find yourself regularly using. Place a player start point – using the perspective window – in both cubes. If you have grid-snap on, shrink the grid size before you try to place a player start, otherwise it won't appear.

Obviously, the computer needs to know which Player Start corresponds to which team. The default setting is set to Red. To set the blue team, simply right-click the Player Start's properties and go to the sub-menu Player Start

and change Team Number to 1. Remember, 0 equals red and 1 equal blue.

Now select each Player Start separately and see if the red arrow is facing in the direction you want it to face – that's the direction your player will face when spawned. If not, select the Actor Rotate from Menu Section D and rotate as needed.

Go to Menu Section C and click Build All. Now in the same section of the menu, click Play Map! and wait...



Check it out! This is what you've built so far.

If you want to see what it's like with a bot inside it, press the Tab key and type ADDBOTS 1, to add one bot. To add more, replace 1 with whatever number you choose, but it's not advised to add more bots than player start points, as it usually causes problems.

POLO TIME

No Bombing Run level is complete without two gaping

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SHOOTERS

LIKE GUNS? PUT SOME IN YOUR LEVEL THEN!

Power ups. Guns. Ammo. Placement of these can make or break a level, so choose wisely and keep balance in mind.

Go to the ACB and click xPickUpBase and then xWeaponBase. Now again, in the perspective menu, right-click and select Place xWeaponBase Here.

Move it so it doesn't go through the floor and then right-click and enter

the xWeaponBase's property browser. Open the xWeaponType drop-down and pick the type of weapon you want for the level. I've selected the BioRifle.

Once done, go back to the Actor Class Browser and expand the Pickup and then Ammo menu and find the ammo for the weapon you chose. You could also add a health pickup if it tickles yer fancy.



Might look like a swimming pool, but it spawns weapons.

holes made for throwing your balls into. Our level's a bit small though, so let's make it a little bigger and add a new section to it. Set grid size to 128. Now we'll scale the cubes on each side until they're four grid spaces high and four grid spaces wide, in the top view window.

To do this, first select one of the subtracted cubes. It has a yellow highlight. If you look closely, you can see a red cross.

That's the 'pivot' of the subtracted cube. We need to place that on the corner of the cube, so that we can resize it more accurately. Right-click on a corner of the cube and go to Pivot> Place Pivot Here.

Now resize the space as needed and repeat for the other cube.



As you'll see, nothing changes in the perspective window. That's because we haven't rendered our changes. To do this, we have to go to Build All again.



Once rebuilding, you will notice that the textures have also been scaled and the lighting

looks different. You can change this as you please.

To finish off, we'll add a jagged path using two subtracted cubes, but we'll save time by using our previous subtracted cube data – including its textures. To do this, right-click a subtracted cube in the Top window and choose Polygons> To Brush.

This copies the subtracted area's data to a new brush. Now click the subtracted brush again and it should come up red. That's the new brush. Scale it and move it as needed to create what is below.



Now for the goals. Go into the ACB and expand Navigation Point>JumpDest and select xBombDelivery. Place one in each of the opposing cubes, behind the respective Player Starts and move and rotate as needed. To assign each goal to a team, simply go to the Team drop-down and input either 0 for red and 1 for blue.

Go to the ACB and select xBombSpawn and place it in the divide of the jagged hallway.

Select Build All and test your level with a Bot inside it.

IS THAT IT?

For starters, all of this should be more than enough to get you well on your way. Of course there's about a gazillion other things you can do, like add reflective effects to surfaces, build terrain, use emitters to



Holey Moses, there's a hole lot of love going on...

HELPING HANDS

For more help, you can find a motherload of tutorials at: <http://udn.epicgames.com/pub/Content/WebHome>.


Or check out the forums at: www.ina-community.com/forums

You can also find lots of useful files at: <http://udn.epicgames.com> and

<http://unreal.epicgames.com> and all the files you need to update the editor at

<http://unreal.epicgames.com> and <http://udn.epicgames.com>.

Big thanks goes out to Tony 'Wolf' Garcia for all his help.

create fires or oozing blood, make moving objects and triggered events. Unfortunately, each one of these items is a tutorial in itself, so for now, we recommend you master these basics. 



Once you become an editing master, you'll be creating this sort of thing before breakfast.

WALKTHROUGH

DUMB AND DUMBER

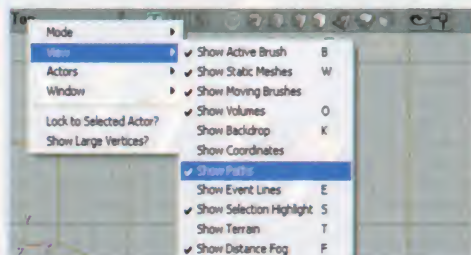
THE EDITOR'S NOT THE SHARPEST SOFTWARE IN THE DRAWER AND NEEDS YOUR HELP

As I'm sure you've noticed, the AI's a bit thick. So to give it a nudge in the right direction, add path nodes. These are

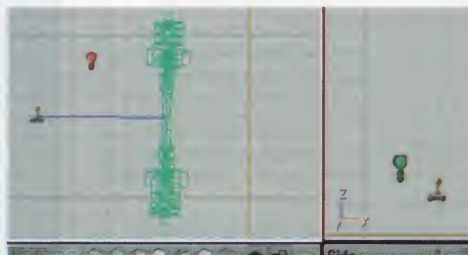
points that tell the AI where it can go. You can find them in your right-click menu or ACB. It's best that you place

path nodes at junctions, and anywhere where rooms meet. However, if you get errors suggesting ill placement of nodes

or such, use Search For Actors in Menu Section A and find the node and tweak as needed. Now select Build All and play.



To see what the AI can see, right-click on one of the view windows like this and select Show Paths.



Now go to Menu Section C and click on Build Paths. The AI draws a path straight to its own goal.



Add some path nodes and click on Build Paths again to see the changes.



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THE MODSQUAD

Tony Lamb and Phil Wand get moddy



The graphics are top notch throughout.



These hideous, spiky, throbbing things make bad guys.

NATURAL SELECTION 1.0

ON THE CD DVD **SIZE** 91Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Half-Life*
www.natural-selection.org

BEST described as what *Alien Vs Predator* might look like after a month of steroid abuse, *Natural Selection* is a truly impressive departure from the underlying *Half-Life* engine. On the one hand it's a real-time strategy game, sporting all the

resource gathering, base building and forward-thinking you've come to associate with that genre, and on the other it's a first-person shooter with guns, frags and rushes of adrenaline. It's different. Really quite different indeed.

While the plot may sound familiar – a team of marines busy themselves with tactics and long-term goals, a hive of aliens make alarming noises and kill stuff with their teeth – the game mechanics are as innovative as they are addictive. To start with, teamplay is essential for every marine. One brave soul assumes the role of commander, looking down on a real-time strategy view of the world, locating new structures, harvesting resources (nano-sludge, of all things), researching new technologies and listening to complaints. As in real life, marines work best together and end up dead if

separated from the group, so even if you have no confidence in the guy in charge it's best to stay in your squad and wait it out.

By contrast, aliens are far more autonomous in the way they go about things. Like the opposing marines they must harvest nano-sludge, but have far fewer restrictions on the ways they go about it. They also have the benefit of something called hive mind, giving them the ability to see what their fellows see, indirectly, as coloured blips on a mental radar.

In short, this is an extremely good game. The interface is a joy. The sounds are perfect. It

looks the part. The one complaint is that the manual, vital to your understanding of what is without doubt the most digressive *Half-Life* mod yet, contains so much science fiction la-di-da that it's almost impossible to read without working up a frown. It has the self-indulgent air of a Jeffrey Archer novel, and because of this many online servers remain at the mercy of clueless newbies who don't have the patience to digest it.

PCZONE VERDICT **93**
 Unnaturally impressive

NIFLHEIM SOULS FEAST BETA 0.51

ON THE CD DVD **SIZE** 101Mb **REQUIRES** Full version of *Quake III*, patched to v1.31
www.planetquake.com/niflheim

THIS total conversion for *Quake III* puts you in charge of Hel, an unpleasant female deity who decides that being the mistress of Hell isn't enough for her and that escape is the best option, which is where you come in. *Niflheim Souls Feast* is all about spells, demonic characters and the ability to fly around magically zapping your opponents into matchsticks. Forget laser guns and sci-fi, here your weapons are the stuff of the occult.

Niflheim gets its inspiration from a 2D shooter of the same name, but does so with the benefit of the *Quake III* engine behind it. Maps are limited so far, but although they all seem a bit small (being able to fly means you can get about pretty quickly of course) they're well designed and convey the atmosphere of the mod. Battles are fast, furious and airborne, with attacks coming from any direction. Player characters are great, with superior detail and animation,

and the visual effects from the weapons and spells will grab your attention too. This isn't the easiest mod to survive – there's nowhere to hide for a start – but once you get used to having eyes in the back of your head it's a blast. A LAN game is the best bet to avoid being bot fodder, but online servers are a rarity.

PCZONE VERDICT **72**
 Hocus-pocus



Hack off Beezelebug and this is the last thing you'll see.



Just when you thought it was safe to go on...

FEBA skins are tops. Probably a bit sweaty though.

Short-range slaughter.

FORWARD EDGE BATTLE AREA: EPISODE 2



SIZE 26Mb REQUIRES Full version of Unreal Tournament

www.planetunreal.com/feba

WE FIRST looked at this action/role-player concoction at version 1.68, and a lot of work has gone into it since. The storyline is still the battle between the United Earth Task Force (UETF) and Havian Rebel Forces, but *FEBA* now features some 20 new weapons, more

than 40 skins and nearly 50 spells, which form the main weaponry for the Havians. If you're not a natural magician you can stick to membership of the UETF whose Han Solo-style reliance on 'a trusty blaster' (the bigger the better) might be more enjoyable.

FEBA can be played on most *Unreal Tournament* maps, which is just as well because its own maps are limited in number, but at least the many third-party maps are open to the novel *FEBA* gameplay. This includes Attrition (Team DM) battles, Assassination (loosely akin

to Assault gameplay with a focus on killing a particular individual), and Battle Area (essentially Capture The Flag and Domination games). Other features include 'kill-counters' to reveal each team's success rate, team personae and voices, and team beacons to identify players

in-game. *Forward Edge Battle Area* is a neat mod, but online support is still unfortunately a bit patchy.

PCZONE
VERDICT

73

Lots of fun



Just when you thought it was safe to go on...

MISSION FAILED



SIZE 13Mb REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life

www.neofiles.com/missionfailed/index

www.neofiles.com/missionfailed/index

NEODELIGHT'S

Mission Failed is a single-player mod for *Half-Life* that prequels the original. Here, the G-man is using a supposedly abandoned facility to teleport aliens into the Black Mesa base and it's up to you to stop him. *MF* has a lot of puzzles and this means that some of *Half-Life*'s bloodthirstier fans may find it lacking, but it's not as overpowering in its puzzle obsession as some, and there are still soldiers and monsters that need to be dispatched if you're to succeed. Grunt AI has always been good in *HL*, and they certainly have an annoying habit of turning up just when you think you're in the clear – not least of all here.

Any new mod will find itself compared to some very big names indeed, and while *Mission Failed* can't compete with these it displays some clever ideas alongside the frustrating puzzles. Unless you have a talent for finding things in bizarre places, the difficulty of the puzzles could well do with being toned down a bit. More work needs to be done on the maps as well, to make them more realistic. *Mission Failed* needs finesse, but shows definite promise.

PCZONE
VERDICT

70

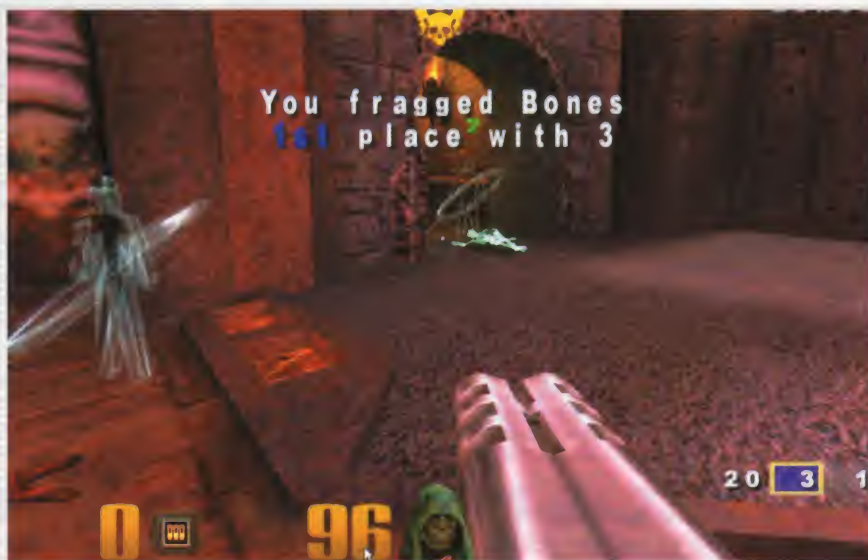
Needs a bit of polish

ADVANCE Q3 BETA 1.11



SIZE 316Kb REQUIRES Full version of Quake III

www.planetquake3.net/advanceq3/



Start with a shotgun and work your way up to bigger weapons.

ADVANCE Q3 is a baby – it's only 1Mb unzipped – but as a gameplay mod it does have quite an impact. Essentially, all the weapon and item spawns have been replaced by health and armour shards, and the weapons available to you are governed by the number of frags you score. The weapons are classed into machine gun and shotgun, grenade launcher and lightning gun, plasma gun, railgun and rocket launcher, and

finally the BFG in a class all of its own. To progress in a class you need three frags. This means that a good player who is careless enough to get himself killed can come up against a less experienced player with a superior weapon and have a real fight on his hands. Every player that dies drops a power-up – invisibility, quad damage or whatever – and the rapid appearance of one of these can instantly turn a fight on its head.

There are other rules governing how long these power-ups and effects last, but these are really secondary to the impact of the mod on the game itself. *Quake III* is the most hardcore Deathmatch experience of its generation, and *Advance Q3* reinforces that.

PCZONE
VERDICT

65

Neat and petite

DISC PAGES

DISCS AND WORDS Mark Eveleigh

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711 482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk BEFORE YOU DIAL... If you are calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on – plus the nature of the fault.
- Have a pen and paper to hand, so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- You need at least a P266 with 32Mb RAM to run the software on the discs. Please note that some games also require a 3D accelerator card.
- Use the browser and menu system to see which demos are 3D accelerator only.

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it is always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.
- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept any responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT – SPEARHEAD

CD1/DVD Pub:: Electronic Arts Reviewed: Issue 123 (82%)

While *Counter-Strike* and *Natural Selection* are the most popular online games this month, *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* has always been one of the best multiplayer games going, and *Spearhead* comes fresh with new maps, objective-based missions and still more *Quake III*-powered beauty.

The multiplayer demo comes with two playable maps and four different game modes, from the standard issue deathmatch and team deathmatch games to objective-based missions. For veterans of the original game, you'll also find some new player models for both the Allied and Axis sides.

Malta is the setting for the first multiplayer map, coated in dust and rubble and gleaming in the evening light as you try and find good sniping points. You'll find a mortar on one side of the bridge, which can be used to clear out those riflemen that have already found a good place to hide. There's also a number of gun emplacements that while useful for covering the shallow river make easy grenade targets.



Throwing a smoke flare will distract the opposition so get shooting sharpish.

One of the most effective weapons in the new *Spearhead* arsenal is the smoke grenade. Similar to those in *Counter-Strike*, the *Spearhead* version is much more realistic, as it uses volumetric smoke to create large areas of cover. They're particularly effective on the Malta map when running through the various buildings, especially if you know that there are a load of enemies up the staircase and you need cover to be able to throw a frag grenade.

Set in a dark German U-boat base, Druckkammern is the second map that

comes with the demo. The lighting here is superb and can be used to your advantage as the defending Axis force. Just find a dark spot and set up your player model in a black uniform and you'll be able to sneak around taking out Allied troops from afar with relatively little trouble.

While the single-player elements of *Spearhead* may not live up to *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, the multiplayer demo proves that the online gameplay is very solid.



The U-boat is impressive but watch out for the Germans in the shadows.

WALKTHROUGH →

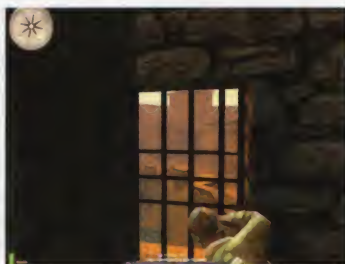
CRATER THOSE NAZIS WITH OUR WALKTHROUGH FROM THE NEW MALTA MAP



1 It's inevitable that wherever you spawn, there'll be an enemy nearby. Clear the area before making your way to the mortar.



2 Make your way towards the bridge. Seal off the portcullis to block up one of the exits for your fleeing targets.



3 Find a good sniping spot and take out anyone crossing the river from there before climbing up to the mortar position on the far wall.



4 Once at the mortar, clear out the river basin once more before bombarding the streets with missiles.

MAFIA

CD1/DVD Pub: Take 2 Reviewed: Issue 119 (92%)



Mafia may have been out for a while now, but there's still a large portion of you out there that have yet to sample its brilliance.

This demo brings you a full mission from the game in which you are required to deliver a package for Don Salieri to the top of a multistorey car park. As with any easy job in the *Mafia* storyline,

things go sour when a rival mob turns up guns blazing to put an end to any future business the Don may have.

Using your Tommy gun, you'll need to take out the first three car-loads of gangsters almost immediately with the assistance of your two comrades. As if gunning down 12 guys between the three of you wasn't enough, you'll soon find that these are just the icing on the cake. There's no quick escape either, as your car is on the bottom floor.



The more you take out, the more ammo is available for the rest.

WALKTHROUGH →

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOU DON'T WAKE UP WITH A HORSE'S HEAD ON YOUR PILLOW



1 After leaving the driveway of the Salieri bar, head out towards the water and follow the compass in the corner of your screen.



2 Drive through the tunnel to the next island, making sure that you press F5 to engage your speed limiter.



3 Once you've made it to the car park, get up and make your way to the top floor.



4 Go and meet the whiskey dealers in the corner of the car park. Get that Thompson ready though, you're about to get some unwanted guests.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS

CD2/DVD Pub: VU Games Reviewed: Issue 119 (85%)

Every once in a while, a demo comes along that provides new things for those who already own the full game, and *Warcraft III* is one of them. As well as two tutorial levels for the orcs from the full game, this demo comes with three completely new scenarios that never made it to the final release. These new scenes take place

between the prologue and the orcs' landing on the shores of Kalimdor.

The demo provides a good portion of gameplay for the orc armies and shows some of the more advanced hero abilities for Thrall, from revealing distant parts of the map to summoning shadow wolves to help your army.



Sen'jin the troll kicks off the new portion of the *Warcraft III* story.

TENNIS MASTERS SERIES 2003

CD2/DVD Pub: Microids



Why are we waiting?

In the wake of *Virtua Tennis*, a multitude of court games have hit the PC and the latest comes fresh from Microids. This demo allows you to play two sets using the various different return types, including slice, flat and lob. The garish colours may burn your eyes in their

sockets, but we rather like the bright purple court.

It might not live up to *Virtua Tennis*, but it's certainly worth a bash and the extra control given by having each type of return on a different key makes it much more strategic.

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE

DVD Pub: Microsoft



The car damage is unrivalled.

While Microsoft torture PC gamers with its gigantic Xbox console, we do occasionally get something good out of the deal. *RallySport Challenge* was hailed as one of the best rally games to hit consoles and has outsold *Colin McRae 3* significantly since release. Here it is on the PC, and we'll be getting a number of extras besides the enhanced visuals to cheer up rally fans.

In this demo, you'll be able to play random quick races with one of four different rally cars, including the Lancer



Evo and Subaru's mightily impressive Impreza WRC. It looks gorgeous and it plays well, so get your cash ready for the finished release.

NATURAL SELECTION

MOD

REQUIRES FULL VERSION OF HALF-LIFE

EXCLUSIVE

CD1/DVD www.natural-selection.org Reviewed: Issue 124 93%

Giger's *Alien* has nothing on some of the beasties in *Natural Selection* with their cloaking abilities, webbing, multiple stages of evolution and general poison-clawed nastiness. Indeed, if the marines in *Aliens* had anywhere near the number of sentry guns that you can resource and build in *NS*, they wouldn't have had too much of a problem cleaning the place up without the need to nuke it. This is intense, team-based combat at its best, merging FPS with RTS and we can't stop playing.

One of the best mods to come out of the *Half-Life* community for a long time, it impressed the hell out of us here at *PC ZONE*. It's on the cover discs so be the first to give it a whirl, and check out the full review on page 140.



Nothing like a bit of tentacle action.



An alien from the inside out.

ZOO TYCOON: MARINE MANIA

CD1/DVD Pub: Microsoft

We've had lions, tigers, monkeys and elephants, now it's the aquatic animals and dinosaurs that get their turn in Microsoft's zoo management expansion. It seems that the standard safari park fair are no longer of interest to your park-goers and it's time to play god and get some reptilian man-eaters in to

keep the kids happy. It's all Steven Spielberg's fault.

In this demo, you'll find four tutorials combined with one Marine Mania map in which you can trap Willy and milk his dorsal fin for all the cash you can get. You'll also find the manta ray and pacific walrus at your disposal.



This is what would happen to St James' Park if McDonald's bought it.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

CD2/DVD Pub: Infogrames Reviewed: Issue 123 (80%)

Theme Park had rollercoasters, but they weren't nearly as good. It was always *Rollercoaster Tycoon* that had the kind of rollercoasters that you know only ten per cent of the riders could survive without swallowing their own brain. A sequel was

always on the cards and here it is with even more insane ride possibilities.

This demo includes a huge array of elements from the game, so if you fancy making some crazy rollercoasters, look no further.



Don't forget to equip rollercoasters like this with sick bags.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE CD/DVD

STRONGHOLD: CRUSADER
MULTIPLAYER, POST MORTEM, ALEX
FERGUSON'S PLAYER MANAGER 2003,
HIGHLAND WARRIORS: KILT INVADERS
MINI GAME AND PLATOON

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE TURN TO PAGE 159

DVD-VIDEO: X2: THE THREAT

For fans of Egosoft, we bring you an exclusive first showing of *X2: The Threat*. The next game in the *X* series is looking stunning, with epic space vistas as the backdrop to some of the most impressive space flight and space combat graphics we've seen. From customisable ships to space trading and fighting, it's all here. Will it live up to the mighty *Elite*? Time will tell.



The best way to go to the shops.

DVD-VIDEO: HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

With the film out now and the books still selling like hot cakes, Harry Potter's next outing on the PC is available now. Surprisingly, the last game proved not only to be popular but actually very good for a licensed game, so we're expecting big things.



DVD-VIDEO: THE MAKING OF FIFA 2003



If you thought that making a footy game today was as easy as back in the days of *Sensible Soccer*, you're wrong. With motion-captured players, complicated ball physics and millionaire football players to deal with, it's a wonder EA Sports can produce a *FIFA* game once every season. In our making-of feature, you'll find information on the complete production process involved with the latest update together with player interviews with Ryan Giggs, Edgar Davids and Roberto Carlos.

Starting with an introduction to *FIFA*, the video takes you through how the AI was developed and then onto motion capture and player model construction. It then details how cameras and animation were used in the game engine, together with elements of stadium design and player modelling. So if you've ever wondered how those computer-generated heads came about, now's your chance to find out.

OTHER DEMOS ON THE DVD

FAR WEST AND TOTAL IMMERSION RACING

FOR FULL CONTENTS SEE THE BACK OF THE DVD CASE

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*19ms ping time taken as an average from a selection of JOLTADSL users

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FIGHT CLUB



Yes we're still playing *Counter-Strike*, but who knows what'll happen next month... Keep your eye on our website, says **Martin Korda**

FREE-FOR-ALL

THURSDAY 9 JAN

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Counter-Strike **OR**
Unreal Tournament 2003
OR *Battlefield 1942*

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Richie Shoemaker	Zapatero
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Mark Hill	Leatherface
Paul Presley	I R Baboon
Lee Cocker	Viper
Phil Clark	Shit Kicker
Danny King-Smith	Ronin
Colin Mackleworth	M.A.C.H.I.N.E.

FREE-FOR-ALL CONNECTION DETAILS

Connecting to our Free-For-All Server is simple. If *Counter-Strike* wins the vote, open the *Half-Life* console and type password *pczone* and then press enter. After this type *connect ffa.zonergames.co.uk* and press enter. You will be taken right there. You can also add the server to popular game browsers such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy 3D by entering *ffa.zonergames.co.uk* where you would normally provide an IP address. If you experience any problems connecting on the night of the Free-For-All then check our forum at www.pczone.co.uk as we may be running a non-*Counter-Strike* server with different connection details, depending on how the voting goes.



UT2003, Battlefield 1942 or Counter-Strike. You choose.

AS I TYPE, we're only days away from the result of our very first Free-For-All vote. And there's still very little separating the three main contenders, *Counter-Strike*, *Unreal Tournament 2003* and *Battlefield 1942*. However, by the time you read this, the voting will have closed for the December 5 Free-For-All, but the good news is, voting for January will be well under way. So why not send us your vote, and let us know which of the above three games you'd like to play. Send your vote to letters@pczone.co.uk with the subject 'Free For All Vote'. We'll be announcing the result of the votes on our website www.pczone.co.uk from January 5, along with connection details, so keep a look out.

Our November Free-For-All, was of course *Counter-Strike*. The server boasted a whopping eight ZONE players, all displaying varying degrees of incompetence and cack-handedness. Faring rather better were those players who this month warrant a mention as Star Players of the Month. They were, in no particular order, Fez, Wall, COLDasIce, Shadowman, Devil, [GM]Martin[GUN], K.I.T, groove and Spl@tio. Well done to you all. [GM]Martin[GUN] and K.I.T are now leading the charge into the PC ZONE Hall of Fame, requiring just one more mention to enter. Find out next month if they do, or whether you've got what it takes to beat them to it. See you online.

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK ON THE DAY OF THE FREE-FOR-ALL TO FIND OUT WHICH GAME WE'LL BE PLAYING. SEND YOUR VOTE TO LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

PC ZONE GAME SERVERS POWERED BY JOLT.CO.UK

OUR SERVERS ARE OPEN 24/7 AND FREE OF CHARGE. WHY PLAY ANYWHERE ELSE?

We've switched our game servers to the ultra-fast Jolt service, which means lag should now be a thing of the past. We've also changed the way you find them, and from now on we'll refer to them by their name rather than by their address. The easiest way to connect is to load the game you wish to

play, go to the multiplayer connection screen and instead of typing in an IP address, type in the name of the server from the list below. They can also be accessed from a server browser such as The All-Seeing Eye or GameSpy. Remember to use the password below, which is updated each month.

PC Zone CS #1 [All Maps] – cs.zonergames.co.uk:27015
PC Zone CS #2 [Dusty] – cs.zonergames.co.uk:27025
PC Zone CS #3 [Custom Maps] – cs.zonergames.co.uk:27035

PC Zone TFC #1 [2fort] – tfc.zonergames.co.uk:27025
PC Zone TFC #2 [Favorites] – tfc.zonergames.co.uk:27035

PC Zone Natural Selection #1 – ns1.zonergames.co.uk:27045
PC Zone Natural Selection #2 – ns2.zonergames.co.uk:27015

PC Zone Q3 [Urban Terror TDM] – q3.zonergames.co.uk:27960

PC Zone RTCW – rtcw.zonergames.co.uk:27960

PC Zone FreeForAll – ffa.zonergames.co.uk:27015

PASSWORD: **lopez**

LAN ROVER

LAN LORD STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL GIVES YOU THE LOWDOWN ON ALL TOMORROW'S LAN PARTIES

Get your sleeping bag, your PC and your mojo together and have a pre Christmas (frag) feast at one of the following LANs.

■ The Leicester Networking Games Club is having their regular LAN on December 14, from 3pm-11.30pm at a new venue along the A426 in Leicester. More details available at www.gdbok.co.uk

■ From December 20-22 it's the Big Game LAN in Southampton. They're onto the 9th party now and places fill fast, so follow the link to www.thebiggame.org/ for info on how to be one of the 60 people playing, it's £25.00.

■ December 13-16 sees the little brother of the I-series LAN running its 12th small LAN in Stratford Upon Avon, by small they mean only 54 places. It'll cost £35.00 for the whole stay. For more details visit www.multiplay.co.uk/.

■ December 21-22 brings the Tripwyr UK LAN Gaming to the end of their first year and also their first overnight event for 40 of you in Whittington Village Hall, Worcestershire. Cost is just £15 if you pay in advance, more on the day.

■ The next GGLAN will be on January 18-19 and will cost £20 in advance (£15 if you mention PC ZONE when booking) or

£30 on the door. I will be there as ever, along with a host of prizes. Visit www.gglan.co.uk for more details.

If you want your LAN party mentioned here, give me two months notice and send beer and bribes to me at my new email steveandall@ntlworld.com. Wherever you play, whatever you play, have a gr8 New Year. Scalper out.

SCALPER'S
NEXT
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JANUARY 18
AND 19
WWW.GGLAN.CO.UK
FOR DETAILS

IS YOURS A GOLDEN SAMPLE?

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MAILBOX

Everybody needs a good rant every now and again, and we're here to listen...

■ **HOLDING COURT** Dave Woods



SPLINTER SELL-OUT

I really am quite angry at this. Last time I heard, *Splinter Cell* was bang on target for a November release. Now I find that it has slipped to January next year. Nothing unusual there, you might think. Games slip all the time. But then I notice that the Xbox version will still be released by the end of the month. I can't find any reason on the net for the discrepancy: perhaps you can help.

I think that it's an evil marketing scheme devised by the almighty powers to aid floundering Xbox sales. I've heard of several people who will now be buying the console version in order to play the game over the Christmas holidays. This really, really isn't fair. Why should I be made to suffer just because Bill's machine isn't as good as the PlayStation 2?

Can you find out what happened? And don't take any crap from them, please. Just keep asking until their ears bleed and they're forced to admit it was all Bill Gates' fault.

Dan Marshall

Yup, the PC release date for *Splinter Cell* has slipped until the end of January and yet the



Fancy *Splinter Cell* for Christmas? Tough.

Xbox version will ship on time and before Christmas. You're not going to get a decent answer from anyone about why, but it doesn't take a genius to work it out.

MAFIA CHEAT

I know loads of people have been having problems getting past the race mission in *Mafia*, so here's how to do it the easy way. Start the race and take your car up to the first checkpoint. If you look to your left there should be a line of boulders and a bit of sand to the side of them. Go on the sand and then continue to follow the road and it should say you're going the wrong way. Continue up the road till you get 'Checkpoint' to appear at the top of your screen and then hit

the numpad's 0 key. This will then take you to the starting grid of the race and you'll be in pole position. Keep doing this trick until you finish the race and you'll win easily.

Dave McAngus

A LITTLE RESPECT

Am I alone in thinking that IO Interactive was a little careless in their handling of religion in *Hitman 2*? The game is great, but I was more than a little annoyed at the way in which three major world religions, Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism were portrayed in the game.

Firstly, Islam. I had no problem in killing a corrupt un-Islamic khan dealing in nuclear weapons, but I did object to the fact that the player

can freely guide an AK-47 into a nearby mosque. According to IO, it is acceptable to let the player run around the mosque courtyard with shoes on, maybe killing a few guards with an AK in the process, spilling their blood and stealing their clothes, with a call to prayer sounding in the background.

And then there's Sikhism. Removing a Sikh's turban to disguise yourself? The turban is as sacred to most Sikhs as a mosque is to all Muslims. The same level also contains a Hindu temple that houses a bundle of weapons, even though the building is supposed to be a place of peace and worship. The question that has to be asked is whether or not the development team even considered handling these religions respectfully.

Mobusher Baig

Eidos and IO Interactive have apologised for any offence caused and reiterated the fact that none was intended. They've also taken steps to amend the game on existing platforms and are adapting the version due to come out on the GameCube.



INCOMING

I've just read your piece on *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* and was wondering, although you already said that we might not see the game until after Christmas, whether you have a release date for the title. I know it's out for the PS2 but I'd prefer to wait as the PC version of *GTA III* was miles better than the console game.

Steven Hinchcliffe

GOT SOMETHING YOU NEED TO GET OFF YOUR CHEST? WRITE TO...

MAILBOX, PC ZONE, 30 CLEVELAND ST, LONDON W1T 4JD, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new graphics card courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Blaster 4 Titanium 4600 is as good as the name suggests, and sporting the new GeForce 4 chipset, it gives you more bang than a rabbit stuffed with semtex.



There's a sneaky way to finish the race mission in *Mafia*.



Although *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* is going to come to PC there's been no word of an official release date. Think April/May though and you won't be too far wrong.

LONG JOHN SILVER

I really love the new features you've started putting at the beginning of the mag. The original and best article, though, is still Stuart Campbell's piece on piracy. And just like the latest graphics card, it's already out of date.

I'm surprised you've made no mention of the upsurge in peer-to-peer (p2p) software like Kazaa and Morpheus and the ramifications they could have on the PC games industry. Back when Stuart did his piece, the p2p arena was full to the brim with dodgy files. Take a look now though and you'll see working versions of every major game released this year, albeit with movies, music and speech often ripped out.

This software is still going because, unlike Napster, there is no central server where all files are routed through. Amazingly, it has had little or no coverage in the PC arena despite the fact that all these games are easily available to anyone with a 56K modem, flat-rate monthly net access and the ability to use a search engine. Anyone that thinks this stuff isn't going to harm PC game sales is really burying their head in the sand.

Ivan Harding

We stand by the two features we printed on piracy, despite the fact they rubbed a few people up the wrong way. People only have a limited amount of money and can only afford to buy a certain amount of games at the prices that are currently being charged. Theft isn't the answer, but how are you going to stop it without trying to address the problem from a different perspective?

FAIR PLAY

With regard to your article about the Fair Play campaign – I won't be buying any games during the first week of December... because I can't bloody afford to! Oh, the irony...

Huw the Poo

FIGHT!

Entertainment has a very real effect on some children. I don't understand it because I can remember watching *Evil Dead* at 12 and not being remotely phased. But that's just me, and I have absolutely no right to speak for anyone else, which is why Jamie Sefton's Comment (PCZ 122) pissed me off so much.

I don't agree with censorship in any form but I wholeheartedly agree with age restrictions. Jamie's ten-year-old cousin may well be excited by *GTA III*, but what ten-year-old wouldn't be? It's the same as finding grumble mags under your dad's bed.

You may not be able to admit it, but there are some kids out there who simply can't handle violence. So I'm on your side when it comes to bringing down the walls of censorship, but I'd be very careful about who gets to see the results. Violent games are intended for a mature audience, and it's everybody's responsibility to keep it that way. Tell that Sefton bloke to think about that, or I'll come round and kick his face off.

Kev Pick

We asked that Sefton bloke what he thinks about that and this was his reply. "If you've

got that much pent-up anger inside yourself then you're obviously not playing enough violent games."

FREE GAMES

Even I, a 2D adventure game fan of many years, must admit that commercial adventures are all but dead. But, there are thriving Internet communities of amateur adventure game creators, who continue to make classic 2D LucasArts and Sierra-style adventures.

One of the most popular of these is Adventure Game Studio, which you can find at www.adventuregamestudio.co.uk. The AGS engine has been used to make lots of high-quality adventures, including a few that could rival classic commercial adventure games.

It would be great if you could spread the word about engines like AGS, through publishing this letter or maybe even a full feature. Help us keep classic 2D adventures alive.

Berian Williams

WOT! NO NEOCRON?

Where's your goddamn *Neocron* review? It's been out a month, it's great: real-time combat, plays brilliantly over a 56K modem (let's see Star



"You may not be able to admit it, but there are some kids out there who simply can't handle violence."

KEV PICK
TELLS SEFTON A THING OR TWO

READER REVIEWS

▲ FANCY A CAREER WRITING FOR A GAMES MAG? WELL PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT...

We want reviews of the games you love or the ones you hate. Each one should be between 50 and 350 words and come with a score out of 100. The best one wins a game from the current charts. Send your review to the standard Mailbox address (see boxout) and remember to include your name, address and telephone number.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

PC ZONE ISSUE 122 – SCORE: 90%

We said... "As it stands, Unreal Tournament 2003 is a stunning piece of work and if you've got a high-end PC it's the perfect showcase for your hardware."



Amazed by *Unreal Tournament*, I immediately bought *UT 2003* when it was released. I was hoping for a massive improvement from the first game and after reading the back of the box it looked like it was going to deliver. Boy was I wrong! Although it's probably the prettiest game I've ever played I can't help but feel massively disappointed. Sure, it's great fun to shred fellow beings into mush with the flak cannon, but after a while it just gets repetitive and a bit dull.

It's not all bad, there are some really nice touches such as the superb graphics and the most advanced AI to date (as well as the infinitely cool Ion Painter) but I believe it lost the essence that the original *Unreal Tournament* captured and has gone down the same route as *Quake III*. Yes, it's much faster and much prettier than the original but it's left off some of the features that made *UT* stand above the rest (Assault mode for example.) Some of the new features are actually a step backwards, like the lightning gun replacing the sniper rifle and the primary fire for the minigun being faster than the secondary (opposite to the original).

I'm not saying that you shouldn't buy the game – it's a truly excellent online experience but they could have done so much more to the single-player side of the game. Even though this is true the game will still shift millions and with the mod community the way it is, you can expect bigger and better things to come.

Owen Staines

VERDICT: 80%

Wars: *Galaxies* do that) and is dark, gritty, raw and as addictive as hell to anyone who likes a challenge. Seriously, *Neocron* is a great game (potentially a brilliant game), so why is it that you have managed to omit it from your Christmas edition? Did fat wallet Lucas pay you off or what?

Shirny Tiger

Calm yourself. By the nature of an online game we can't go into the world and review the game before people are actually in and playing it. The people in an online game are the game. That means we can't review it until it goes on sale – that happened after last issue's deadline, leaving us to run



Another unnecessary shot of a lap dancer from *Neocron*.

the review this issue (see page 80). There's absolutely no conspiracy going on, we simply want to make sure we get our reviews spot on.

BT TRIGGERS

With regards to the letter printed in Issue 123 by Crarch in relation to broadband, there was an inaccuracy, which I felt compelled to highlight (sorry all). Broadband will only be enabled by BT once confirmed orders are placed. Simply registering without the intention of ordering the product will do more to hinder than to help the rollout. If the trigger level says 250, then 250 users need to sign up for and pay for the broadband service, simple as.

Kevin Liversage

PANTS

I don't write games. I don't develop, or publish them. I can't write code but admire those who can. My drawing's not bad but I'm pants at graphic design. Molyneux? He's never heard of me. Gates hasn't got me on his Christmas card list and I've never been to any of Rockstar's gigs. So why then, with all that in mind, am I so important to the games industry? Because, when gates lights his cigars with yet another \$10 bill, that's my money he's burning. I am a paying customer! I read reviews, I buy my games and I spend time playing them.

With all that said, please let me ask the following. Why is so much shit being pumped out in games stores at the moment? Am I getting old? There are so many good developers out there and so many good writers, so why is there not more quality out there? I don't mind spending the money but I want my money's worth!

Ned Alexander

There might be a lot of, ahem, crap, out there, but luckily there's enough that's good to keep you going every month. Keep reading our reviews and we'll point you in the right direction.

CM WHORE

I've been an avid *Championship Manager* fan for years now and have bought every copy apart from the original. I've been waiting for news and updates on the development of *CM4* but I'm lucky if I get the odd sentence every couple of months. Now I see they're selling an official *CM4* preview magazine for £5.49. Hmm, call me a cynic but does this explain the absence of much info about the upcoming game in your mag?

And good old SI are also planning on releasing more than one issue of this preview mag. How nice of them. They are effectively not releasing any information to games mags like you so that their 'dumb' customers will go and buy their own preview mags. I can't convey how disgusted I am at their cheap marketing tactics and how annoyed I am that they now want me to buy their own advertising for their game.

Peter Rogers

If you know *ZONE* you know we love *Championship Manager* and it's sad that all the information is being held back. However, as the official mag it won't be reviewing the game (picture it: "Brilliant. 100 per cent!") and we've been promised it first. We contacted Sports Interactive and this is what their marketing manager Miles Jacobson had to say...

"The reasons for doing the CM magazine are very simple. We had a choice between letting a magazine do a preview of the game much like the recent one in PC ZONE which was two pages, or the ability to provide fans of the game with a 23-page preview and lots of other news. We chose the latter. We will be doing other issues of the CM mag, and PC ZONE will get as much material as they need to cover our games in the way that they see fit, but the official magazine will be the first place to see information about our games.

"We have actually gone out on a large limb making our own magazine, risking other mags deciding not to feature our game. Thankfully, ZONE are a lot more mature than certain publications and treat our games and all others in the same way, without any of the 'good review scores for

exclusive reviews' shenanigans that allegedly goes on in this industry. If you want to continue getting the superb coverage that PC ZONE give to our products, then keep buying the mag. I know I will be."



We love CM. They love us.

READER REVIEWS

STAR
REVIEW

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
ISSUE 124 SCORE: 54%

We said... "There is a maximum of ten hours game time here – and that's if you find it extremely tough going, which is unlikely. Competent third-person action/adventurers are more likely to clock it in about three hours – around the same amount of time it takes to watch the film."

I bought the game, rushed all the way home, installed it with haste and started playing just to find it was over before I could say boo. What an absolute rip off – £30 for three nights or four hours playing, and that's only if you decide to fight most of the enemies. Apart from the level bosses which you have to finish off to continue, you might as well keep running, avoiding the enemies as you go because you'll get so far and the game automatically takes you to the next level while you replenish your life.

Graphics-wise the game looks good, control is a bit ropery with the looking up and down movement restricted as is your path through the game – there's no walking over the beautiful landscape here.

On top of this, I made the mistake of not reading the title properly, I thought this was the complete game. This is only the first installment with another two parts to follow, so it's going to cost me another £60 if I want the full experience... I think not. Another set of 'Blair Witch' games in the making I think. Don't buy this game, it's a rip off. I'm sorry I bought it and would gladly return it for a refund if I could. I buy a lot of games but this is the first time I've been moved to complain so vehemently. A very unhappy and gutted Tolkien fan.

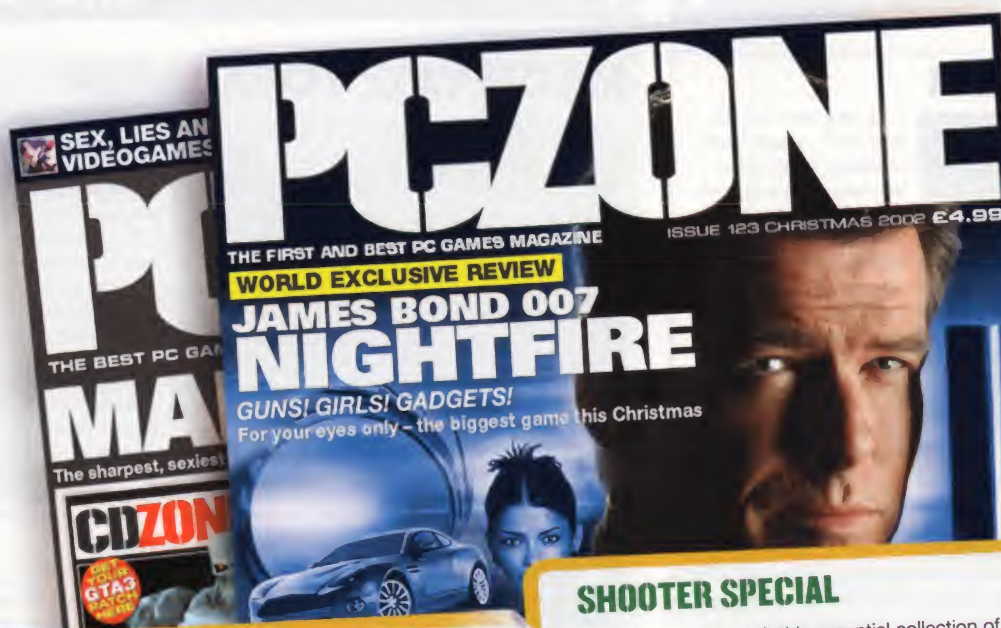
Don Moss

VERDICT: -100%



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THE PCZONE A-LIST

SHOOTERS

MEDAL OF HONOR



It may have taken years but finally there's a shooter worthy of toppling *Half-Life*. Brilliant level design, surprisingly good AI, an unparalleled sense of atmosphere and intensity, not to mention beautifully scripted scenes. It's also the first game that Richie has finished three times in as many months, and the first FPS Rhianna has finished in her life, which gives you some indication of the game's worth.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

The single-player shooter of the moment only makes number two in the A-List, just losing out to *Medal Of Honor*'s multiplayer mode. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122



HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

Not a million miles away from the last *UT* title, *UT2003* does however make leaps and bounds graphically. With finely balanced weapons, smart bots and diverse maps it's the reigning king of speed fragging.

PUB Infogrames DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 122



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

The first *Star Wars* game to be awarded a *PC ZONE* Classic award since the original *Jedi Knight* back in 1997. This is more than just a simple FPS, it's frustrating, rewarding and extremely good fun. A new hope has come.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 115



SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II

The bloodiest game in the world is back, but this time there's a brilliant game cowering beneath the carnage. Sublime AI is the chief culprit and if you can stomach the violence this is a must buy.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 118



ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

If we rated games on atmosphere and tension *AvP2* would've been the highest-scoring game ever. The multiplayer game and 3D engine brought the score down, but for scares nothing can touch this three-way fragfest.

PUB Vivendi DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 110



BATTLEFIELD 1942

Even though it features a disappointing and heavily bugged single-player campaign, *Battlefield* is one of the most compelling team-based multiplayer games ever. A must have for any online shooter fan.

PUB EA DEV Digital Illusions

PCZ ISSUE 121



MAX PAYNE

It's not big and it's not clever, but for style and content *Max Payne* receives top marks. The character animations and soon-to-be-copied-by-everyone Bullet Time mode are the real stars, it's just a shame it only lasts a few hours.

PUB Take 2 DEV Remedy

PCZ ISSUE 107

STRATEGY

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR

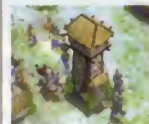


A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more. Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based Risk-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



NEW ENTRY AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail throughout and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123



WARRIOR KINGS

A visually stunning and hugely ambitious RTS that melds the strategic diversity of *Battle Realms* with the huge 3D rolling landscapes of *Shogun*. With a compelling story to boot, no strategy fan should be without a copy.

PUB Microids DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 114



COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

There are 8,000 troops at your disposal in this historically accurate RTS. Smooth unit movement, a 3D landscape with real physics modelling and great graphics and sound make it truly absorbing. An essential purchase.

PUB CDV DEV GSC Gameworld

PCZ ISSUE 101



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Z will re-ignite your passion for strategy games with its fast-paced in-er-face action that allows you to get down and dirty from the off. The AI is superb and, as it's entirely mouse-driven, it's simple and easy to get into.

PUB EON DEV Bitmap Brothers

PCZ ISSUE 101



ETHERLORDS

This unexpected gem might just be good enough to convert those who immediately associate 'turn-based' with the word 'geek'. The visuals and sound are stunning, the tactical variety truly staggering – fantastic stuff.

PUB JoWood DEV Nival Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 112

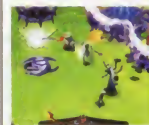


WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119



BATTLE REALMS

Emerging from the quagmire of all too similar RTS games this is a genuinely ground-breaking strategy game. It does have its flaws which include a tedious plot, but the great use of sound, visuals and gameplay shine through.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Liquid Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 111



SUDDEN STRIKE

Sudden Strike mixes WWII action with classic RTS gameplay in order to create a compelling strategy title. Its large-scale battles, huge selection of units and superb interface make it a must for RTS fans.

PUB CDV DEV Fireglow

PCZ ISSUE 96

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers. Get in.

◀ ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

DEUS EX



Warren Specter is one of the true visionaries of the computer game medium, and this is his magnum opus. Combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming. The fascinating sci-fi plot and amazing attention to detail, combined with unparalleled player freedom are just some of the reasons why *Deus Ex* is a landmark in gaming.

PUB Eidos DEV Ion Storm

PCZ ISSUE 93



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Bethesda Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 117



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they are still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Infogrames DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 118



PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorching of an RPG.

PUB Interplay DEV Black Isle Studio

PCZ ISSUE 87



DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft DEV Gas Powered Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 80



BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay DEV Bioware

PCZ ISSUE 96

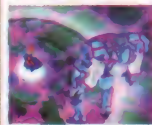


DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV DEV Larian Studios

PCZ ISSUE 121



FREEDOM FORCE

Control your own group of superheroes in this immersive and fully destructible comic book world. It may not be the most sophisticated and bearded of RPGs, but *Freedom Force* is unadulterated bubble-gum fun at its best.

PUB EA DEV Irrational Games

PCZ ISSUE 115



ARX FATALIS

This is a graphically beautiful role-playing game with more than a few hints of *Ultima Underworld*. Its hugely detailed and realistic environment made this a PC ZONE Essential.

PUB VU Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ ACTION/ADVENTURE ▶

GRIM FANDANGO



If you've followed the successes of LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must-buy. The comic interaction between Manny and Glottis is a high watermark for scripting in games, while sublime graphics and laugh-out-loud humour ensure it's at the top of its genre. A word of warning though: it's bloody hard and if your mind doesn't work laterally you'll be playing it until the day you die.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 71



SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre, with a compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos DEV Crystal Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 111



DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and all the better for it in our opinion.

PUB Infogrames DEV Perfect Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 79



THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Computer Artworks

PCZ ISSUE 121



PRISONER OF WAR

One of the most original games available with a light-hearted setting and an atmospheric soundtrack, which makes it more of an adventure than an action title. *POW* makes a refreshing change from the usual mass slaughter fare.

PUB Codemasters DEV Wide Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

The revamped *Hitman* engine is nothing short of breathtaking, blessing the sequel with gorgeous graphics that fit well with the refined controls and superbly realistic AI. *Hitman 2* is solid and enjoyable with a great sense of gameplay freedom.

PUB Eidos DEV IO

PCZ ISSUE 121



SEVERANCE: BLADE OF DARKNESS

Anyone who doesn't mind being splattered with the kind of gore rarely seen outside *Soldier Of Fortune* will find much to like in *Severance*. But it stands out from the usual hack 'n' slasher with its amazing engine and combo system.

PUB Codemasters DEV Rebel Act Studios

PCZ ISSUE 98



PROJECT EDEN

Giving you control of four variously skilled operatives in a nightmarish future metropolis, *Eden* is at once predictable and innovative. The combat and AI may be dull, but the varied puzzles and raft of cool gadgetry make up for it.

PUB Eidos DEV Core Design

PCZ ISSUE 107



ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND

One of the hardest things to do in a game is to make your audience laugh with you rather than at you, and *Escape From Monkey Island* is undoubtedly one of the most genuinely funny games to come out in recent years.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 98



INDIANA JONES AND THE INFERNAL MACHINE

LucasArts moves away from the point-and-click genre and into *Tomb Raider* territory for its latest Indy game, but with many of the adventure elements still in place. The result is surprisingly good, but not for traditionalists.

PUB Activision DEV LucasArts

PCZ ISSUE 84

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game both breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and lets you guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Overall we think it's pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Infogrames DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, but you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucketload.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70



SIMCITY 3000

Ten years on, the offspring of the original building game *SimCity* still remains as addictive as it ever was. Little was broken, and little was fixed. With new buildings and an enhanced transport system, *SimCity 3000* is a must for old-timers and new addicts alike.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 74



EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay over 50 missions, spanning seven historical campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll also have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



NEW ENTRY ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

As utterly absorbing as its predecessor, *Rollercoaster Tycoon 2* once again revolves around designing and managing your own theme park. This version also allows you to design individual rides as well as including a handful of real-life coasters. Detailed and addictive.

PUB Infogrames DEV Chris Sawyer

PCZ ISSUE 123



MONOPOLY TYCOON

This mixture of the classic board game and a *Theme Park/SimCity*-style building sim is an admirable attempt at something a little different. Played in real-time, the aim is to make as much money as possible. Great fun for a while, but it quickly becomes repetitive.

PUB Infogrames DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 110



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79



CALL TO POWER II

It might not have the official endorsement, but *Call to Power II* is a spiritual successor to one of the greatest strategy games of all time, *Civilization II*. The gameplay is familiar but every element has been polished and the result is a hugely challenging and rewarding experience. It's still well worth seeking out.

PUB Activision DEV Activision

PCZ ISSUE 98

◀ SPORT ▶

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: 01/02



Another year, another update and yet another improvement on the greatest sports management game of all time, one that will literally consume your life. New features this time around include masked attributes (forcing you to scout for talent), updated team and player stats, and all of the new rules and regulations imposed by FIFA for the new season.

Pure genius.

PUB Eidos DEV Sports Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 108



VIRTUA TENNIS

Who would have believed that this console favourite would translate so well to the PC? Its control interface is supremely intuitive, while the AI is massively challenging. Best of all, though, are its truly sublime multiplayer options.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 114

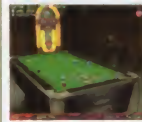


TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

This third edition of Tony Hawk's classic skateboarding game is an absolute joy to play. It features enormous levels, more interaction than ever before and a totally kick-ass soundtrack.

PUB Activision DEV Neversoft Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 98



VIRTUAL POOL 3

Easily the best cue-based game around, *VP3* features some near perfect physics and excellent graphics. The career and multiplayer modes are highly entertaining, and a superb tutorial will have you cleaning up in no time.

PUB Interplay DEV Celeris

PCZ ISSUE 99



FIFA 2003

This latest offering in the *FIFA* series seems to have been influenced by *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* on the PS2. *FIFA 2003*'s immaculate presentation, realistic players and solid gameplay make it the best football game on the PC.

PUB Electronic Arts DEV EA Sports

PCZ ISSUE 122

◀ DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO III



It may have taken its time getting onto the PC, but *Grand Theft Auto III* was definitely worth the wait. Offering you both traditional linear missions and a wonderfully freeform world ripe for exploring, the game boasts stunning graphics and superb attention to detail. It's a great spin on both the driving and shooting genres and we can assure you that you'll love this noisy orgy of violence and speed. Crime really does pay.

PUB Take 2 DEV Rockstar

PCZ ISSUE 117



GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Infogrames DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119



COLIN MCRAE 2.0

This is still the benchmark rally title and looks set to remain so until *Colin McRae 3.0* appears. The graphics are fantastic, the detail is overwhelming and the cards handle beautifully. So if you are on the look-out for the definitive rally game, this is it.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 110



CRAZY TAXI

One of the best arcade conversions to the PC that we've seen for a long time. *Crazy Taxi* is a bright, colourful and in-ner-face driving experience that's built on solid arcade values and good old fashioned insanity.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Hitmaker/Strangelite

PCZ ISSUE 119



MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Buckle up for some high-speed action as you race around London and San Francisco. The original *MM* was a better, but with improved cars, races and controls, this is even better. We reckon it's the definitive arcade racer.

PUB Microsoft DEV Angel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 96

MULTIPLAYER MODS ▶

COUNTER-STRIKE



Counter-Strike is the game that has completely dominated the online world for more than a year now, and its popularity still shows absolutely no sign of abating. With more servers in more countries than any other mod and a totally dedicated army of fans, *Counter-Strike* has really proved that bedroom coding is alive and well and is in better health than it ever has been.

WEB www.counter-strike.net

PCZ ISSUE 109



DAY OF DEFEAT

Currently in its second beta, this WWII-themed *Half-Life* mod is being played by more people online than both *Medal Of Honor* and *Wolfenstein*. It's atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

PCZ Issue 115



TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC

A great *Half-Life* squad-based action game with nine classes, a wide variety of weaponry and many map variations. The action focuses on infiltrating enemy bases, and the frantic gameplay requires more manual dexterity than most.

WEB <http://www.planethalflife.com/tfc>



STRIKE FORCE

Hot on the heels of *Counter-Strike* comes this superb total conversion mod for *Unreal Tournament*. It boasts outstanding maps and attention to detail, including heartbeat monitors that measure stress and infrared laser dot aiming.

WEB www.strikeforcecenter.com

PCZ Issue 109



JAILBREAK: POW

Two sides, two jails and a lot of fun. If you get fragged you get jailed and you have to stay until you're released. When all the team is in jail you get executed. All-in-all, one of the best QIII mods available.

WEB www.planetquake.com/bkp

PCZ Issue 109

3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104



GHOST RECON

A superb squad-based shooter, which masterfully combines tactics and action. The levels range from wide-open landscapes to claustrophobic city streets, in what is a stunning evocation of special forces warfare.

PUB Ubi Soft DEV Red Storm Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 110



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115



HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage DEV Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101



NEW ENTRY PROJECT NOMADS

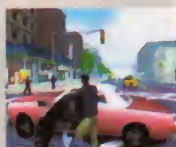
A polished and innovative game set in a lush fantasy world full of rich detail and wonderful aesthetics. If you're after something a little off the beaten track, you'll find *Nomad's* blend of strategy and action/adventure a refreshing change.

PUB CDV DEV Radon Labs

PCZ ISSUE 123

ALL-TIME CLASSICS ▶

ZONE'S RETRO GAMING EXPERT STUART CAMPBELL CHOOSES HIS TOP TEN GAMES OF ALL TIME.



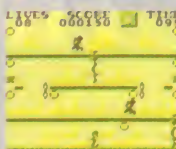
GRAND THEFT AUTO III (PC)

Like Dreamcast epic *Shenmue* gone bad, *GTAIII* is less a videogame than a virtual holiday, except unlike *Shenmue* it's a holiday somewhere you'd never want to go. The game structure is oddly reminiscent of *Super Mario 64* – there are set things to do, but it's also just a giant adventure playground you'll never tire of just messing around in. Sheer genius in 3D.



PERFECT DARK (N64)

I loathe mouse-and-keyboard control in FPS games more than you could ever possibly imagine, so it's a console-only genre for me, and *Perfect Dark* is the best it's ever been. It obviously had less impact than the mighty *GoldenEye*, so tends to be overlooked in favour of the Bond title, but it's a superior game in almost every measurable way.



BILL AND TED'S EXCELLENT GAME BOY ADVENTURE (GAME BOY)

This spiritual descendant of the seminal *Chuckie Egg* is byte-for-byte the best platformer. Squeezed into about 60K of code were 50 single screens of the most fiendish platforms ever, designed to be played at a lightning pace by the gorgeous, flawless controls. The perfect Game Boy game.



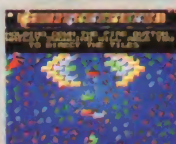
REBELSTAR (SPECTRUM)

Released at the ridiculous price of £1.99, this turn-based strategy game boasted a believable, coherent environment that wasn't bettered until *Super Mario 64* and *GTAIII*, giving you the opportunity to invent entire new games for yourself in the gameworld. It was resurrected in *Email X-COM*, the best online game of all time, which was spitefully killed by Hasbro. Bastards.



TEMPEST 2000 (JAGUAR/SATURN/PC)

Jeff Minter's unique approach to game creation is a curious hit-and-miss business. For every glorious *Gndrunner++* there's always a disastrous *Defender2000*. But with *T2K* (as its friends call it), everything – graphics, weapons, enemies and sheer adrenaline – came together spectacularly in an intense blasting frenzy that was also a beautiful and synergistic work of art.



WIZKID (AMIGA/ATARI ST)

Even something as bizarre as *Tempest 2000* though, has to take a back seat weirdness-wise to the most overlooked gem in the Sensible Software catalogue. A game that completely defies convenient description, *Wizkid* was a magnum opus of invention and irreverent humour that was just too much for the average gamer to take in. The average gamer is an idiot.



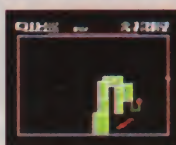
3D DEATHCHASE (SPECTRUM)

It was pretty hard to leave all the *Ridge Racer* games out of this list, but for sheer white-knuckle need-for-speed thrills, this 9K eight-bit classic just nudges them aside. The only things in the whole game that can damage you in any way are trees, which, being trees, don't even move. Yet time and time again, like an idiot, you manage to smash into them. Breathtaking.



PONG (PSONE/PC)

The absolute pinnacle of remakes. Most games that attempt to update old classics for the modern age fail miserably, capturing neither the essence of the original or exciting and distinctive gameplay of their own, but *Pong* manages both with effortless ease. With nothing more than a bat and ball, you get about 40 radically different little mini-games, and every one's a joy.



QIX (ARCADE, GAME BOY)

Some games get it so completely right the first time they simply can't be improved. There have been dozens of official and unofficial follow-ups to *Qix*, every one of them dreadful because they throw out the perfect risk-versus-reward balance that makes *Qix* perhaps the most addictive game ever. It's hard to accept you've just been beaten by an Etch-a-Sketch.



BANGAI-O (DREAMCAST/N64)

This game here representing not only itself, but also *Robotron*, *Smash TV*, *Oids* and the entire *Treasure* canon, from *Gunner's Heaven* to *Radiant Silvergun*. An insane, overwhelming shoot 'em up where you could unleash up to 400 missiles at a time in dozens of intricate, clever and varied levels, it's simply the most entertaining shooting game of all time.

VIRGIN LOVES



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"A cute isometric escapade that incorporated elements of platform gaming"



People still hope for a sequel, unfortunately one seems most unlikely.

RETRO ZONE

AUGUST 1997

After a 20-year wait, **Richie Shoemaker** learns **Ewan McGregor** has stolen the role of **Obi Wan**. A blessing in disguise

LITTLE BIG ADVENTURE 2: TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY

France's answer to *Final Fantasy*

NOT TO belittle our Gallic cousins across the Channel, but these days it's very difficult to get excited by the latest French game, especially those interminable flick-screen *Myst*-style adventures that seem to arrive on a weekly basis. It wasn't always the case. It may surprise some of you to know that back in the late 1980s and early '90s, LucasArts wasn't the only developer to crank out cracking adventure games. *Future Wars*, *Operation Stealth*, *Cruise For A Corpse* and of course the ground-breaking *Alone In The Dark* all cycled to the top of the 16-bit charts, wearing strings of onions proudly around their hooped jerseys.



Though he may have unwittingly banged the first nail in the coffin for the point-and-click adventure, *Alone In The Dark*'s designer Frederick Raynal went on to conceive something a little different for his next game *Little Big Adventure*, a cute isometric escapade that incorporated elements of platform gaming and starred a pointy-eggy-head thing called Twinsen. And, of course, a sequel followed, offering fully rendered 3D outdoor landscapes, isometric indoor levels and even the odd bit of shooting and driving. It was quite possibly the cutest game ever to grace the PC, one of the most absorbing, infuriating and original games full stop and, on the standard of more modern efforts, unlikely to be toppled as one of the best games ever to come from the land of the baguette.



LBA 2 featured a number of fun sub-games, like racing and gambling.

THE BEST OF THE REST



HEXEN II (PC)

Raven continued its association with id Software when it released the first *Quake*-powered game. As with its muddy predecessor, *Hexen II* allowed FPS fans to choose from a number of different characters; Paladin, Assassin, Necromancer and Crusader, and you could pounce around a number of fantasy 3D levels. Cow flinging was a highlight, but it wasn't one of Raven's best games.



FIFA SOCCER MANAGER (PC)

The first of EA's now annual footy management games arrives, minus the big money backing that today we take for granted in EA sports games. Of course *Champ Man* was still the undisputed king, but even against lesser footy management sims (remember *Premier Manager* and *Ultimate Soccer Manager*?) *FIFA* was a messy game, with little accuracy, and not much gloss.



BLOOD OMEN: LEGACY OF KAIN (PSX/PC)

After making PlayStation owners holler with unrestrained pleasure, it was the turn of the PC to play host to Kain's first adventure in the land of Nosgoth. You played the titular vampire, running around top-down levels, sucking blood and killing enemies that wandered around in *Manic Miner* fashion. Unfortunately *Blood Omen* looked and played like a five-year old game.



PLANETARY RAIDERS (PC)

Publisher Interactive Magic was once the whipping boy of the games industry, releasing three crap games for every mediocre one. It went under eventually, but in its time it had a couple of interesting titles. *Planetary Raiders* was one of them, being the first ever 3D online space trading game. And a pretty decent game it was too, at least it would have been had it been released.

NEWS

GAMING NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1997

- After news that a TV series based on LucasArts' cartoon crime-fighting duo *Sam And Max* has been commissioned, rumours begin circulating that film versions of *Doom* and *Tomb Raider* have been scripted.
- 3D Realms announce *Max Payne*. Due early 1999, the game eventually arrived late 2001. 3D Realms' other hot new game, *Prey*, never saw the light of day.
- *Carnageddon* – the game they tried to ban – races to No 1 in the PC games chart. Questions are asked in the House Of Commons, but the nation soon loses interest when Tiffany gets off with Beppe and Grant Mitchell finds out.



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

AGE OF EMPIRES

Age Of Empires transformed the real-time strategy genre into an elegant blend of tactics and resource management. **Richie Shoemaker** uncovers the secrets that led to one of the most successful PC games of the modern age

GAME Age Of Empires

DEVELOPER Ensemble Studios

RELEASED October 1997

INFLUENCED Along with C&C, *Age Of Empires* is cited by almost every strategy game developer as a major influence. Perhaps just as significantly, *Age Of Empires* changed the image of its publisher almost overnight. Perhaps without *Age Of Empires* there would have been no Xbox. Who knows?

PROFILE

One a gaming legend, the other an accountant – together they brought real-time strategy gaming into a more civilised age



NAME Rick Goodman

FIRST GAME WORKED ON

Amazingly, it was *Age Of Empires*

ROLE ON AOE Lead game designer

NOW DOING We are working on a super-secret project, which we believe will appeal to *Empire Earth* fans and *Age Of Empires* players alike.



NAME Bruce Shelley

FIRST GAME WORKED ON *Wooden Ships & Iron Men*. I don't know if it was ever published. The first published game I

worked on was *F-19 Stealth Fighter*.

ROLE ON AOE Designer

NOW DOING Taking it easy and reading all the glowing reviews of *Age Of Mythology*, the third in the *Age* series.



"When Microsoft first came we spent about 10 minutes demoing a man chopping a tree"

BACK IN 1996 Microsoft may well have been the biggest company in the world, fronted by the richest man alive, but it didn't necessarily follow that by providing virtually every PC across the planet with the means to operate that Microsoft made the finest games. Neither prolific nor prodigious, Microsoft's entertainment output was up to that point notable only for its annual update of *Flight Simulator*, a game about as entertaining in the eyes of most gamers as that other great Microsoft entry into gaming's hall of legends, *Solitaire*. If Bill Gates and co wanted to be taken as seriously for their entertainment software as they did for their

applications, they needed to release a killer game. Little did they know that in February of that year they'd found one.

Although development on *Age Of Empires* begun early in 1995, Microsoft had little to go on when they first saw it later that year, as Rick Goodman, *AoE*'s lead designer recalls: "When we invited them to visit us, they came and we spent about 10 minutes demoing a man chopping a tree.

"Truly, there wasn't much to show at that point. You couldn't construct a building, research a technology, or conduct combat. But, a villager could chop a tree. Microsoft saw this and concluded that we were working on a 'Life Sim'. Apparently, they needed a Life Sim in their portfolio. So, soon afterwards,



Look! Elephants! Crazy, man.

Microsoft offered us a publishing agreement. I'm still not exactly sure why."

BACK TO THE STONE AGE

Ensemble Studios was born in July 1994 out of Ensemble Corporation, a Dallas-based database accounting company, founded by brothers Tim and Rick Goodman. Seemingly bored with developing spreadsheets and running out of wacky ties with which to brighten the days, it occurred to the duo to replace their suits with standard issue Atari T-shirts, grow their hair down to their arse cracks and start programming games rather than relational databases.

"Before working on *Age Of Empires* I was an accountant," reveals Rick. "I had loved gaming of all types, video and board games, for 20 years before starting to work on *Age Of Empires*, but the possibility of actually designing a game, much less a videogame, had never occurred to me."

'Stealing' a programmer from the mother corporation, Rick began work, first by burying the programmer under a pile of programming manuals and hoping he might come up with something, which he did months later to the surprise of everyone – a small 2D FPS game demo, providing the gang with the inspiration to carry on and create a game.

"We had no idea what game to make," remembers Rick. "I bought a copy of the original *Warcraft* and we then embarked on a quest to figure out what to do. We considered a cowboys and indians game, a railroad game and

"It's safe to say that few of us had any real experience creating a computer game, we had no idea what we were getting ourselves into"

RICK GOODMAN LEAD GAME DESIGNER

a game in which you were trapped on a deserted island and had to solve puzzles to escape.

"Then at the start of 1995 we hired Bruce Shelley and formed a three-person committee, consisting of Bruce, myself and my brother. We met each week to discuss proposed game ideas before finally deciding on 'a real-time *Civilization*'.



If in doubt, build large brass statues of yourself.

The concept behind *Age Of Empires* then grew out of those meetings."

THERE'S A BRUCE LOOSE

It's hard to imagine that someone who would later be considered a gaming legend, with hits such as *Civilization*, *F-19 Stealth Fighter* and *Railroad Tycoon* already under his belt, would become involved with an unknown games studio without much experience of what was becoming a risky business to be in. But as the old adage proved, it's as much about who you know as what you know and Tony Goodman, the business brains behind Ensemble, had an old acquaintance keen to help out.

At first Rick Goodman, Tony, and I met regularly on the phone to discuss the design. Then Tony got more involved in building the company, leaving Rick doing most of the work with me helping him."

While the small team of Ensemble's programmers worked on a 2D tile-based engine to power the game, the three designers (Rick, Bruce and new recruit Brian Sullivan) cracked on with the design, working with elements of Blizzard's *Warcraft* and Sid Meier's *Civilization*, aiming to balance the immediacy of the former with the realism and depth of the latter.

"Those games were definitely the biggest influences," says Rick. "There

"I think the single greatest influence and resource available to any designer is all the games that already exist," says Bruce. "Our games originally derived from several classic games and then began to derive from our own creations. We did a lot of research and conceptualising because it took a while to get an engine together to build a prototype. Angelo Laudon did a fantastic job as our lead programmer making that happen. From the first prototype the game just continued to evolve through playing, adjusting, recoding, and so on, over and over."

"Over time, the vision changed," says Rick, "as development progressed from the conceptual stage to the implementation stage. It's safe to say that few of us had any real experience creating a computer game, so we had no idea what we were getting ourselves in to. As a result, the game charted its own direction, much more so than any one team member charted the direction for it. Our philosophy was: as long as the game was becoming more fun to play each day, then we felt we were on the right path."

GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

Considering Ensemble's speciality was business software, it remains something of a minor miracle that development on their first ever game continued with few real problems. With much of the team receiving on the job training, and veteran Bruce Shelley's skills centred on design rather than coding, neither he nor Rick Goodman can remember any significant problems.

"If I had to choose one major challenge during development it would be the performance of our 2D graphics," says Rick. "The engine was relatively slow and we recognised this early on. So Matt Pritchard went to work rewriting it. His idea was, rather than redrawing the entire screen each and every frame, we would, instead, keep track of every individual pixel on the screen and only update those pixels that need updating. I had no idea if such a thing was even possible... but after eight months of work he completed the task and we got a massive boost in graphics performance."

As the game neared completion, with Microsoft now on board, the problems of having 12 races and numerous units and buildings and technological advances in the game became apparent. Balancing the gameplay would be a huge undertaking that Ensemble recognised they would have to get right early on.

"To our credit we started the play balance process eight months before we shipped," says Rick. "We used every minute of that time to attempt to balance all of the civilisations and all of the units in each civilisation. We had never done such a thing before, so we didn't know how to go about doing it. Therefore, we just had everyone play multiplayer games every day from February to September of 1997. We did a pre-game briefing and a post-game debriefing. Then, I made play balance changes to the game and we played again the next day. I think we

"Tony was an old friend from many years earlier," recalls Bruce Shelley. "When he and colleagues at his business applications company were thinking about getting into game development, he started calling me up and asking pretty detailed questions about the process of creating games. Eventually he asked me to get involved.

were elements of those games that I liked and some that I felt could even be improved. I liked the epic scope of *Civ* and the random maps, but I really wanted our game to be multiplayer. I liked the graphics and action orientation of *Warcraft*, but I felt that a historical 'realistic' game would have a broader world-wide appeal."

THE FUTURE: WHAT AGE IS NEXT FOR THE EMPIRES SERIES?



Does AOM spell the end of these historial RTSs?

IT'S TIME FOR STEAM AND ARTISTS IN BIG PANTS

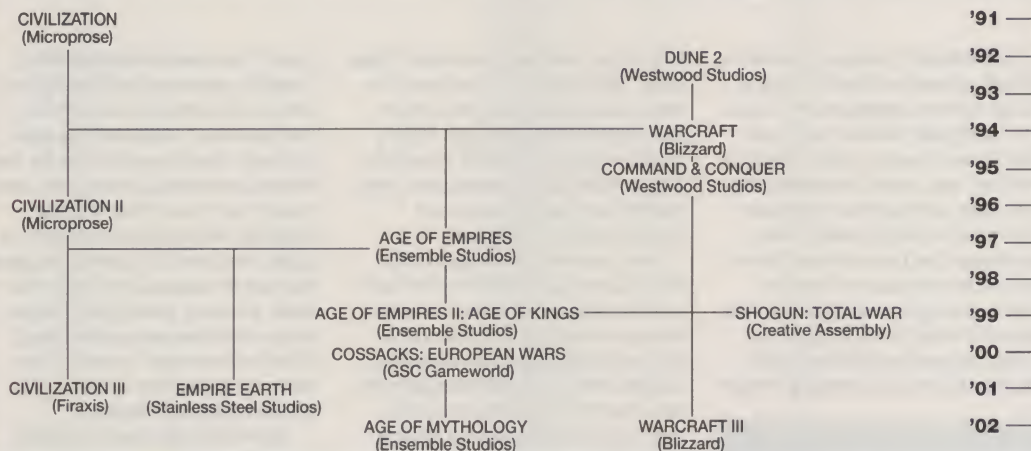
With the first game set in the ancient world, the second during the medieval era, it seems obvious that the next *Age Of* game will be set from Europe's early Renaissance period until the Industrial Revolution, the age of technology, a time during which culture, government and science developed at a rate unknown since the Roman Empire. Ranks of musket-wielding infantry will patrol the battlefield, trains will chuff across the countryside

carrying linen for trade and villagers will pack the local factory to make heavy machinery. That's our theory anyway.

Whether Ensemble has plans to dive straight into *Age Of Empires IV*, or instead branch off again into the realms of fantasy for *Mythology's* first add-on, we can be pretty sure that the team will want to make more use of their new 3D engine. We haven't seen the last of the *Age Of Empires*, that's for certain.

THROUGH THE AGES

UNTIL *AGE OF EMPIRES* CAME ALONG NO GAME HAD MANAGED TO MARRY THE DEPTH OF *CIVILIZATION*'S EPOCH-SPANNING EMPIRE BUILDING WITH THE FRANTIC REAL-TIME BATTLES OF *WARCRAFT* OR *COMMAND & CONQUER*. ALTHOUGH ENSEMBLE HAS REFINED THE FORMULA MANY TIMES SINCE, UNDERNEATH IT ALL LITTLE HAS CHANGED



played a total of about 500 internal play-test games during this period, not counting the Microsoft test team's parallel effort in Redmond."

AGE OF SALES

That *Age Of Empires* wasn't quite the Life Sim game they'd signed up to publish didn't seem to worry Microsoft as it soon became apparent during months of testing both at Ensemble and Microsoft HQs that it would be a huge success, with forecasts putting worldwide sales at the half a million mark. This for Microsoft made the game comparable only with *MS Flight Sim* and *MS Golf*, their only two real hit games to date. In fact, the game was so successful that the first shipment totally sold out, leaving Christmas shelves across the US empty of stock.

"We had no idea at the time, but, in hindsight, *AoE* turned out to be a real blessing for Microsoft as well as for Ensemble Studios," says Rick. "Microsoft was suffering badly in the minds of gamers and in the press. Even we felt the splash damage before the game was

"Age Of Empires will always be special, however, because it was a beginning for so many great things that have happened since"

BRUCE SHELLEY DESIGNER

completed. At one point, before the game shipped, we wondered whether the Microsoft name might actually have a negative connotation in the minds of gamers.

"We only realised how successful the game was after we ran out of copies during the holiday period in 1997 and it went past one million copies sold." Recalls Bruce. "It was continuing to sell really well at that point, there was a huge fan community around the game, and it was clear it was appealing to a broad audience. The response greatly surpassed our expectations, although we knew the game was good."

It was at this point that Rick Goodman, the game's leading architect, decided to

leave the studio he helped create. In 1998, he formed Stainless Steel Studios and soon began development on *Empire Earth*, in many respects an even more ambitious game than *AoE*. This took the real-time concepts of its predecessor and added in the entire past, present and potential future of Earth history.

"After *AoE* I had a clear vision of the game I wanted to do next," says Rick. "Ensemble also had a clear vision, so we amicably parted company so we could each pursue our own goals."

THEY SOLD A MILLION

Today with combined sales of *Age Of Empires*, its two sequels and two expansion packs in excess of 8.5 million,



Blue walls? With my reputation.

it seems unlikely the series will ever come to an end. What imperfections remained have largely been ironed out as the series has evolved. Though relatively basic, the real-time clashes inspired by *Warcraft* are today regimented battles, with players able to organise their armies into intricate formations – just one of Ensemble's innovations that come as standard in real-time strategy games since. The latest in the series, *Age Of Mythology*, takes the series in a new direction, both in terms of setting and the new technology powering it, though the core concept – to have fun – has remained central.

"I would hate to pick a favourite out of the games I have worked on," says Bruce. "I think in general I believe the most recent is the best because each builds on those that came before. *AoE* will always be special, however, because it was a beginning for so many great things that have happened since. The fact that we provided so many different gaming experiences within the same box, allowing such a broad spectrum of gamers to find a way to play and enjoy it worldwide, from casual to hardcore, children to seniors, in countries from Germany to Taiwan. Few games achieve that appeal. That is what I am most proud of."

"I think *Age Of Empires* is a great game," says Rick Goodman. "The sequel too is wonderful, but I have never thought of the original as being a gaming milestone. I do believe that there are games that are definitely milestones in history. But, personally, I don't consider *AoE* to be in that category."

Microsoft we're sure would disagree. And anyway, what do accountants know about games? [P]



The under-fives Serpentine regatta was getting a little out of hand.



Blood – it's good for the grass.



COMMENT

Is the Internet breeding anonymous robots who are too good for the rest of us?

Phil Wand thinks veterans should get out more

PC ZONE freelancer David McCandless was very good at *Doom*. One day he turned up with his trademark floppy hair, a mouse and some cardboard, and challenged me to a deathmatch. He then proceeded to wedge the shift key down with a piece of cardboard and blow non-existent bits of fluff from the bottom of the mouse. "What's that for?" I laughed, pointing at his peripheral. "Fancy your chances at Photoshop instead?" His fringe flopped at me with disdain. "Tell me you're not still using the keyboard."

A little deflated, I sat down and fired up the opening level from *Doom II*. I was in the main corridor, nestling in a kink at one end. I instinctively made my move, but before I knew it I was in a heap, clutching my throat. I was about to complain that I wasn't ready and ask for a restart when I heard frantic scuffling noises. "Need more friction! Can't play without friction!" I found an old newspaper for Macca's mouse and we got going again. This time I was just running for the switch on the lift, when the world went crimson and I heard the click-clack of reloading shotgun

to one side. Now hang on a minute. Bang, dead. This went on for 15 minutes or so – bang, dead, bang, dead – after which time I decided I'd had enough. Having spent months of immortality in matches against my friends, here I was now being made to look like a kid who'd just pulled the game from its box.

And you know, I don't recall being bitter. Having your tormenter in the same room and knowing who they are means you can ask questions and learn stuff. I discovered the joys of using a mouse, oddball strafing techniques and jamming keys down so you sprinted the whole time. I got my arse kicked but became wise at the same time, which is more than can be said of Internet games. Every game online has a bad-ass somewhere in it. Someone with a natural aptitude for twitch shooters. An aptitude that has been honed, sharpened and poison-

down. They moan ceaselessly about camping, spamming, backtracking and other peculiar things nobody knows nor cares about. And while they might be loving, sharing people in real life, they become humourless, robotic prigs when online. Every one of them is a John McEnroe, whamming balls at kids on a public court, and it's time they recognised that part-time players don't want them there. Someone, somewhere needs to keep a skills database and handicap these "professionals" or prevent them from mixing it with the amateurs. But it'll never happen of course.

Not so long ago I gave up playing *Team Fortress* because it simply wasn't fun any more. Mostly it was due to the fact that the games were full of arrogant dickheads. I have since gone back to playing LAN games where I can meet, greet and talk to the people I'm up



Some people spend too much time playing games.

"Without the cloak of anonymity, bad attitudes will dry up and games will become fun again"

tipped over the course of several years spent tucked away in a bedroom or a study with only a microwave meal for company. And you know what? They're taking over.

Gone are the days of truly enjoyable rounds, where players were out for a laugh (or just back from the pub). Veterans bitch constantly at their team mates. They deliberately join and dominate games on servers where the skill level is a few rungs

against. Online they are unseen, arch rivals, who come and go without you ever knowing anything about them, but in real life they're regular people who don't mind sharing a few secrets. So, if Internet gaming is to develop, the first thing it needs to do is display contact details for every player, veteran and newbie. Without the cloak of anonymity, bad attitudes will dry up and games will become fun again. **EW**

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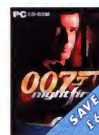
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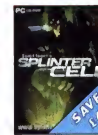
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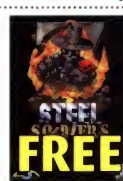
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